
The Untold Tomorrow

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PROLOGUE

Administrator Rikker eagerly settled in to watch the live television feed of the President from a conference room at NASA's Kennedy Space Center. As a political appointee, it was unusual for an administrator to take such an active interest in what amounted to nothing more than anomalous sensor data, but Rikker preferred to be in the thick of things, even the mundane. The long flight time had left the Administrator unable to return to Washington, D.C. to attend the annual State of the Union address being made by the President. Rikker, a man who had little personal interest in the political process, listened as 'Hail to the Chief' was played by the news station in the background. What drew Rikker's attention tonight was the President's promise to outline NASA's new direction to the entire nation, promising sizeable funding increases. On the high definition monitor, Rikker watched as the President walked into the House of Representatives to address the nation.

Administrator Rikker wished that he could be in attendance, if only to be a symbol of the new NASA. In the past several years, the space agency had been plagued with contract scandals, congressional investigations, and Justice Department indictments. His predecessor had resigned in disgrace, leaving Rikker to restructure a demoralized agency. Since then, the President had tried accommodated Rikker with a larger than normal budget to bring in the best talent and jumpstart long delayed space missions. The top job at NASA held few rewards for the young or aspiring; few Americans would know his name, but should an accident occur, every single politician in Congress would want his head on a platter. The exploration of space had proven to be a dangerous business and no matter how safe the simulations say a mission might be, something was bound to go wrong from time to time and in a very public way.

Other NASA personnel had begun to trickle in, setting around the conference table to watch as the joint session of Congress opened with the President shaking countless hands. With nearly every member of both houses of Congress in attendance, including eight of the nine Supreme Court Justices, the House chamber was fully packed. Rikker watched as the President waded through the crowd toward the Speaker's podium. Standing attentively in the front row, the President's Cabinet and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff looked onward as the President waved to the crowd, slowly quieting the chamber to begin his speech.

"Mr. Speaker, Vice President Griffith, members of Congress, my fellow Americans: I stand before you by law and custom to deliver to you the State of our Union. As a nation, we have endured tough times with a global recession dampening the productivity of our economy and testing the resolve of the American worker to compete on a global scale. We know the challenges are many. We know the path ahead is not easy. But as Americans, we are committed —"

The video feed suddenly went dead and Rikker was pulled back into the reality of the conference room. Rikker spun his head around, glancing at the Kennedy Space Center director who shrugged his shoulders. A new anchor suddenly appeared on the screen.

"It appears we're experiencing some technical difficulties with our feed from Washington. Please stay with us, once again this is the Presidential State of the Union Address live, please stay tuned..." the anchorman said.

"What's that all about?" Rikker asked out loud.

The Center's Director murmured something as he tried to work the television's remote. "I'll try another channel." Several stations didn't even appear, nothing but static filling the screen. The remaining stations showed confused news anchors awkwardly trying to fill time, waiting on their television feeds.

"Maybe a spot of bad weather knocked the power out," Rikker said.

"It's possible. A small power overload could send the entire Eastern grid into darkness" the Director replied.

"I'll call my secretary back in D.C., she'll probably knows what's up," Rikker said as he took his cellular phone out of his suit pocket. Rikker pressed one of the speed-dial numbers and the call attempted to connect.

"Nothing," Rikker said. "That's frustrating when people don't answer their phones. No point in having them if no one answers." Rikker grumbled a bit, throttling up the phone number for NASA's operation's desk.

"The number you have dialed is unavailable. Please hang up, check the number, and try calling again," the automated voice responded as Rikker's disposition began to change.

"What the devil is going on here?" Rikker demanded.

The other NASA staff members were growing increasingly concerned as several of them reached for their phones to check for the latest news. Something wasn't right, and Rikker knew it. Major government agencies' phone lines were never down, that was always made sure of twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. His mind played with the possibilities, but only one stood out. Rikker felt his stomach tighten as he briefly closed his eyes and prayed he was wrong. He turned to the Director once more.

"Where's the biggest Department of Defense center outside of the Pentagon?"

**North American Aerospace Defense Command
Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado
2110 Hours**

John Stone drove his black sport utility vehicle through the mountains of the Northwest United States. A Graviton Heavy Industries seal etched on the side of the car was easily visible as John drove through one of the countless security checkpoints that guarded the underground mountain complex. The vehicle had been kept in perfect condition, in thanks to his father's love of cars. Also the government's love of security was obvious in the SUV: armor plating, inch thick bulletproof glass, and run-flat tires were just some of the protective features. John slowed the vehicle to a crawl as a foot of concrete and metal alloy slid aside to allow him to drive through a yellow lit tunnel. The company's Research & Development facilities had been designed around the same general design parameters as NORAD's Cheyenne Mountain complex, an entire research facility buried deep in the side of a mountain. In theory, the facility could survive a direct nuclear attack. Today, more than ever, John did not want to test the facilities' limits.

Stone accelerated through the heavy outer door and it immediately began to close as soon as the vehicle had cleared. The SUV came to a stop and John stepped out. He stood about six foot tall, had dark black hair that was neatly cut, with a pair of brown eyes. He was now the new president and CEO of Graviton Heavy Industries, a military research contract company experimenting in weapons and vehicles. His father, Stephen Stone, had been the founder of Graviton and had helped the company soar to new heights, with the help of several government contracts. However Graviton was also developing the next generation of combat craft: space-based military craft with amazing implications for the future of humanity and military strategy.

John swiped his identification card through a scanner and submitted to a fingerprint and DNA scan. He waited a moment, and then allowed another computer terminal to perform a retinal scan. Finally, a titanium door hissed as it opened to allow him entrance into the central operations center of the mountain complex. Few knew about the true nature of Graviton's government contracts and even fewer had ever stepped foot into the operations center of the R&D complex.

Around the 1960's, based around events of the infamous "Roswell Incident," Graviton was commissioned to research, and then reverse engineer an apparent alien craft that the military had shot down using an experimental weapon commonly referred to as Tesla's Death Ray. With the alien craft as a template, Graviton was tasked with replicating its highly advanced technology for wide spread deployment. The project was labeled as a Special Access Program and placed in the custody of a private company, suppressing knowledge to even those at the highest levels of government. To the disappointment of Stephen Stone and top military officers, Graviton was not able to recreate the alien power source used for propulsion. Without adequate power, Graviton's prototype vehicles sat dormant in R&D's mountain hangers.

John walked briskly through the operations center that was brimming with computers, readouts, charts, maps, and monitors everywhere. He walked through another sealed doorway and was immediately greeted by a hanger large enough to park several commercial jetliners. John's eyes briefly scanned over the usual sights including several large vehicles based off of a prototype model of the SR-72, often referred to as the flying triangle.

The newest models were to be designated SR-74 following what was known as the Aurora Project. Few people spoke of the SR-73 project and John instinctively knew that the project must have suffered a catastrophic accident.

The new SR-74 models were the primary source of inspiration provided their operational status. The first prototype was built as nothing more than an interesting experiment. However, once it proved successful, yet another was built as to avoid putting the technology at risk should the worst occur. John looked around the massive underground hanger and saw everything appeared to be in operating order. He scanned through the on-duty personnel and finally saw who he was looking for. He quickly made his way over to where a man was working on several large hardware boxes.

"What is our current status?" John asked to Jason Jones, the SR-74 chief technician and Graviton's overall chief of development.

The five foot ten inch tall man turned around. Some of his dark brown hair covered his forehead that complimented his blue eyes. "We have *another* recovered alien craft, and we are reviewing its condition. It appears that this one shows promise," Jason replied.

"Really? Is it still operational?" John inquired.

"Sure is, we have been working around the clock to replicate the effects of its systems. We estimate that we could have a breakthrough any-time. We've been feeding the data into the super computers for hours," Jason replied.

John forced a smile, something he hadn't done for quite some time. The recovery of an operational alien power system was excellent news, but he wished that the reasons that presented this opportunity had been much different.

Earth was under attack by a group of aliens who had been only known as the "*Grey*." The government of the United States had known about the existence of the Grey for a great deal of time, but had refused to release any of the information it possessed, for fear of mass panic and hysteria, or possibly an overthrow of the government itself. John was not sure of much about the Grey, but the more he knew, the more he despised them. The conspiracy theorists believed them a ruthless group of aliens that lacked emotions or feeling and knew only how to survive by eliminating and absorbing other cultures. Up until recently, John dismissed conspiracy theories as nonsense knowing full well that organized alien life was the stuff of science fiction. Now the evidence was irrefutable and the proof had come at a terrible price.

The Grey's attack had come swiftly and was effective beyond comprehension. The United States government had believed its own military forces were sufficient to stop any attack, but the Grey had the military easily outgunned. The Grey made use of their advanced technology to arrive without being detected by the military's spy satellite network and began a brutal orbital bombardment of Earth. In less than ten minutes, every major capital on earth was ablaze or completely annihilated.

With the world paralyzed in the horror of mass destruction, the next wave of attack came in the form of "UFOs," designated as the Grey special fighter and heavy bombing ships. The Grey had destroyed major cities throughout the world, annihilated the United Nations headquarters clean off the face of the earth, destroyed the American seat of power and its top leaders, and ensured that any recognizable form of organized world government was severely hampered. The enemy's deliberate timing and incredibly accurate intelligence was far beyond any scientific estimate, they knew exactly where and how to bring the world to its knees.

John clenched his fist as he remembered his father as well as all those who had died when Washington, D.C. was destroyed in a massive blast of energy that fateful night. In addition to his father, John's wife and eight-year-old daughter had been missing since the chaos began. The State of the Union had changed; there was barely a national government to speak of and civilized society was on the brink of collapse in areas close to the destruction. The Grey would pay for what they had done, every last one of them. John held the thought of revenge long enough to bring a sense of peace to his mind. The Grey had arrived on Earth's doorstep without any substantial opposition, but John was determined to bring the fight to them. John laid down the design schematics of the SR-75, a prototype his engineers thought impossible without functional alien components. But with more damaged alien craft in the past twenty-four hours than in the past sixty years, Graviton had exactly what it needed to build a functioning prototype.

In the days following the attack, the world's militaries used every weapon in their arsenal to attempt to destroy the Grey. The U.S. Strategic Command ordered every available aircraft into the sky while simultaneously launching barrages of nuclear missiles into the upper atmosphere. Despite mounting fierce resistance, conventional weapons had little effect against the Grey's superior shielding technology, which made the future of the resistance dismal at best. The only hope lay in a Graviton research facility attempting to adapt an alien power source for a reverse-engineered propulsion system that had no proven track record. As the U.S. Department of Defense and other world military agencies continued to fight until the last man, science and creative engineering were at work. All previously recovered alien craft were decades old and thoroughly dismantled. The new attack on earth had given Graviton many new alien ships to analyze. After weeks of research and reverse engineering, a breakthrough was finally made in the Graviton complex, and the power source of the Grey had been successfully reproduced. Although Graviton's version would only be a fraction as efficient as the Grey's, John was convinced this technology would give humanity what it needed most, hope. Graviton Heavy Industries was finally ready to fulfill the contract given to it by the United States government: build and maintain a space combat fleet to elim-

inate all hostiles and to protect the future of all peoples in the frontiers of space.

Chapter one

Graviton Mountain Complex
Northwest United States, Earth
1750 Hours

A massive crater and scattered piles of debris were all that remained of Washington, D.C. The capital of the United States of America, as well as countless other countries in the world, had been annihilated in a show of power by the Grey's capital ship. The people no longer looked to the skies to see jet fighters of the U.S. Air Force flying past at incredible speed; all they saw now were the UFO-like fighter and bombing vessels of the Grey alien race. The ship's specialized hulls were emblazoned with alien insignia, which glared down menacingly, as if to suppress any who would dare oppose it. As the Grey began to extract the resources of the planet, a counter-attack against the Grey was already underway in a deep mountain fortress owned by Graviton Heavy Industries.

John Stone, the newly appointed leader of Graviton Heavy Industries, entered the large semi-circular briefing area and made his way to the podium in the front of the room. He paused as his employees, researchers, and engineers

took their seats and the room fell completely silent leaving only tension in the air. Since the death of the company's founder, Stephen Stone, John had been left to take control of his father's company, and also his father's greatest project. John took a deep breath and then opened his laptop that automatically connected to the large flat screen monitor behind him. He had never been a public speaker, but here he was, about to rally the troops for war.

"I am glad to see that you all look well given the circumstances," John said with a small smile. "As many of you already know, our engineers have been working around the clock to adapt the alien power source to interface with our prototypes. Though we have been unsuccessful in the interface, we have managed to provide a substitute power source. The nuclear fission reactors previously in use were not powerful enough for the SR-75 prototype, but with a seeming goldmine of alien technology, we've been able to speed our work exponentially. Just after the attack began, conventional intelligence methods captured these images not long after the invasion of what we believe were responsible for the initial attack."

John pressed several buttons on his laptop and then a video appeared on the large LCD monitor behind him. The room of engineers and scientists held their breath as they viewed the video recording of the alien craft. It was massive,

well beyond anything humans could have launched into space. The ship was long and relatively narrow, sporting what appeared to be a large cannon at the forward section of the ship. The length of the ship was lined with launch bays and weapon emplacements, and the rear emitted a green glow, as though it were venting engine exhaust. The video zoomed in to show Grey ships near the launch bay openings, no doubt entering and exiting the massive ship. In several sections of the recording, a visible ripple effect could be seen across the launch bay opening. A sudden flash appeared from the alien ship and a second later, the video feed went dead in static. John shifted uneasily as a hushed murmur circulated around the room.

“Since the attack, we’ve been gathering all available government records on the Grey, focusing our attention on intelligence data. We’ve established a general idea of what we’re up against, but large amounts of data was destroyed or rendered inaccessible when Washington was hit. We have little to no information as to what other capabilities these aliens possess. From their initial attack and subsequent shows of strength, we must assume they know that humans do not have the ability to effectively fight back against them. For instance...”

John paused and accessed something else on his laptop. The monitor behind him quickly changed from the video to a large seal of the Na-

tional Aeronautics and Space Administration. A bar at the bottom of the screen filled as a message saying “Establishing Link” appeared. After a few seconds of waiting, the screen changed to a view of the stars.

“We’ve managed to uplink with the Hubble-II space telescope, NASA didn’t have the opportunity to enjoy its new toy very long, but we have found it to be an invaluable resource to gain intelligence, though, due to its orbital pattern, Hubble’s usefulness is limited to a direct line of sight with the target. Fortunately that’s all we’ve needed. We have, here, a recorded section where H-II passed near the alien ships during its most recent orbit.”

The monitor flickered and it displayed a gigantic circular ship with spikes emanating from its edges. What appeared to be small dots on the video were in actuality, very large ships flying in and out of this massive “mother-ship.” The “mother-ship” sat completely stationary as a shield appeared to ripple when the smaller, mobile ships flew through the invisible barrier. Some of the mobile ships exited the camera’s field of vision and appeared to be heading towards earth. Smaller alien ships then came into view and appeared to prepare to dock with the larger ship.

“How come the aliens didn’t destroy the Hubble telescope? If they researched us, I’m sure

these aliens would have known about our satellites,” one of engineers shouted out.

John quickly responded. “We honestly don’t know. Perhaps the Grey just didn’t realize that this was a giant video camera watching them. It’s anyone’s guess really though, with their demonstrated intelligence thus far, I’d be very cautious in deeming them so naïve.” John paused for a brief moment. “Based on what we’ve been able to observe, this is the only major ship in orbit, acting as a hub or launching pad for all the smaller ships we’ve seen in the atmosphere.”

“What about the ship you showed earlier, you know, the one with all the guns?” a scientist in the front row asked.

“I’ve been unable to ascertain the status of the capital ship or even how many there were in the initial attack. It could have been destroyed by the military, but we’re theorizing it’s accomplished its mission of initial orbital bombardment and has moved on. Nevertheless this data has been able to give us some more observational data on Grey shielding technology than the past half-century combined. It is their shielding technology that renders our conventional weapons almost completely futile. If we’re going to have any hope of going toe-to-toe with them, we need to compete on their level. We’ll need energy weapons.”

Upon learning about the secret prototypes and the true nature of Graviton's research, John had thrown himself into his father's design schematics. He quickly found that the prototypes were designed to be equipped with a large particle-based cannon, a technology that Graviton itself had pioneered. These weapons were developed to destroy Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles during the Cold War, but the project was said to have been scrapped. In reality, the project was merely put on hold for fear of tipping the balance between the superpowers and igniting a real global war with Russia. More deadly than lasers, more accurate than conventional missiles and cheaper to build than nuclear weapons, particle based weapons represented a potential game-changing leap forward in the weapons of war.

John paused to let the hope sink in before he had to give his team the bad news. "I will be upfront with all of you. We've received word that the aliens have begun the exploitation of the human race," John said as he paused again. The blunt manner in which he delivered the statement caused a stir.

"We'd been tipped by various sources, and it's been confirmed with the photography from two active spy satellites. The aliens have evidently taken to some type of mind control. The Graviton-Russia plant reported that the Grey has taken busloads of humans and then implanted

them with devices. They speculate that the Grey ship in orbit sends the device instructions that somehow influences the human brain. We haven't detected any known format of transmission to support the theory, but so much about Grey technology is beyond our comprehension. We do have a plan, though...Susan, would you care to explain?"

John stepped down from the podium and a dark haired woman stood up and took center stage behind it. John had appointed Susan Cole to be his tactical advisor since the entire ordeal began. Susan had been raised in London, but later left the U. K. to come to the United States to attend a prestigious American university. Her extensive studies with proposed quantum computer design and theoretical energy research papers enabled her to be noticed by the top researchers within the military. After having lived in the States for about twelve years and acquiring citizenship, Susan joined the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency as a technical specialist. Gaining the confidence of her superiors and becoming quite reputable at getting the job done on schedule, Susan was assigned as the DARPA liaison officer to Special Access Program Graviton. Known internally as simply *Cosmic*, it was the umbrella program for Graviton's alien research.

"We will begin here," Susan said in a loose-British accent. She used a laser pointer and

pointed at a side-section of the Grey ship that was still being shown on the recorded video feed. “We are designating this craft as a Grey capital control ship, the term “mother-ship” is far too cliché, I rather think.” She began, cutting her eyes to Stone and making a valiant effort to suppress a smile. “We will focus all of our firepower on it. Due to its circular nature, we shall assume it to be equally defended from all sides; therefore we must concentrate our attack on a specific section if we are to have any effect, whatsoever. The ship is bristling with weapon emplacements and turrets. They can most likely down a conventional craft with a single shot. More in-depth tactical targeting data will be sent once operations are underway. This is a hastily planned assault, but we need to attack very quickly before the Grey can establish a foothold here. Once they establish that foothold, we may not be able to tell friend from a foe. The more people they implant, the more knowledge they inevitably gain. In that case, it will only be a matter of time before we are overrun by our own forces.”

“This is complete madness, its insanity, suicide! We can’t fight an enemy like this where they are the strongest! Space is a hostile enough environment without being shot at, all we have are prototypes,” a scientist shouted out.

An engineer shouted down the scientist, “This is to save our future. We all have a duty

that has to be realized. This is for our family, for our friends, and by God, for our lives! Would you have us just sit back and become pod-people?" He said as the scientist slowly lowered himself back into his seat.

Susan gave a prim nod of approval. "The enemy knows that human space technology is primitive from their perspective. An attack in space is where they will least expect us. At the very least, it'll be one bloody hell of a surprise," Susan said with a slightly defiant grin. "We'll be outnumbered on the ground before long if we do nothing, for all we know the implants are being used to raise an army. In order to strike now, we need the two modified SR-74s and the prototype SR-75 in our attack. Mr. Stone has stated that he will coordinate and lead the attack in the 75 prototype. This is strictly a volunteer mission as anything could happen once we pass the point of no return."

Susan looked the group over and added, "The goal is to place a nuclear warhead *within* their shielding. With any luck we'll destroy the mind control and the ship. The mission is simple: penetrate the shields, drop off the cargo, and then get the hell out of there as soon as bloody possible." Susan gave a quick nod to John as she stepped down. He stepped back to the podium, while looking out at the team that his father had handpicked. Now he was asking them to risk

everything to save everything they had ever known.

“We face an unknown enemy that has made it very clear they see us as a resource which can be used up and thrown away. What do we have? We have three prototype ships, with some experimental reverse-engineered technology. But we have something else that they have never had... We have pride, we have the willpower, and we have the damn tenacity to live free, by God. I’d rather take my chances destroying the Grey, rather than be turned into some zombie-like slave. We stand on the precipice of something great, a world changing event where our very survival as a species is on the line. We will leave tomorrow at 0700 hours sharp. Get rested and good luck to us all.”

John gave a crisp salute to the group, folded his laptop up and exited the briefing room. He was finally able to give a sigh of relief as he entered his own quarters. The lights turned on automatically revealing a modestly sized living space. As John put his laptop down, he saw the one thing that had helped give him the strength to keep on going. It was a picture of his wife, Linda, and his daughter Jessica. They had been on their way to Washington, D.C. to meet with his father when the capital had been attacked, but somehow he refused to believe that they had been killed. It was an unshakable feeling he had deep inside him, but his colleagues had told him

that it was denial, a defence mechanism to shield him from the pain. He still couldn't shake the feeling he felt in the pit of his stomach that there was more he could do. John said a silent prayer as he wondered if his mission had any chance of success. The odds were against him, but people always seem to have this amazing stubbornness that sometimes brings out the best in humanity.

Chapter two

Graviton Mountain Complex
Northwest United States, Earth
0500 Hours

John slowly drifted in and out of consciousness until finally the alarm buzzed loudly on his nightstand. It had been a restless night, and the day to come would no doubt be even worse. John groggily hopped out of bed and quickly got ready. He dressed, fixed his hair and began to shave. *No need to die looking like a slob*, John thought to himself. He watched the coffee pot fill as the refreshing aroma of freshly ground beans filled the room. After pouring a cup into chrome colored travel mug, John quickly left his room to meet with his chief technician. John rode one of the facility's lifts deeper into the mountain complex, and finally exited on the assembly and preparation dock.

In the center of the hanger, the SR-75 prototype gleamed in the artificial hanger light. At nearly 360 feet, the ship was as large as a football field, yet it was elegantly shaped. The ship was narrow in the front, as though cutting neatly through the air, followed by gently expanding

curves before the sides juttred out at angles to form the rear wings. The prototype appeared to be a fusion of organic and technological design, with the best of both. The ship was coated with a stealth-like black paint, sharing its color with the now retired SR-71 Blackbird spy plane. John quickly spotted Jason and Susan standing nearby and hurried to receive a status update.

"You're all up early, couldn't sleep?" asked John.

"Morning sir, just couldn't let anyone get too close to my baby here overnight," Jason replied, waving his hand at the SR-75.

"So Jason, is this thing really going to fly? It boggles the mind to think something this big could even get a foot off the ground" John inquired.

"Don't be such a pessimist John," Susan interjected. "The Hindenburg was over double the length of the SR-75 and it flew."

"It also crashed," Jason replied.

"That's not the point Jason," Susan responded. "What is important is that size has no bearing on an object's ability to fly using this technology. It does come down to an object's weight and thrust which we've solved in the SR-75 prototype"

John nodded his head approvingly. "Do we have any new intelligence on the enemy?"

“Overnight we were able to pinpoint the general frequency signature in use by the Grey command ship,” Susan replied.

John couldn’t help but yawn due to a lack of sleep. He took a swig of his coffee. “So the Grey frequency signature, what does all that mean for all of us?”

Jason began to slide into one of his technical ramblings. “That means that if you emit an energy field on the same frequency as their own, then you should be able to get pretty damn close before you’re detected. It would be like broadcasting that you are one of them; they wouldn’t even bother taking a second look at you. To do this properly, we’ll need to spin the ship’s plasma rings right around 47,000 RPM prior to engagement. We’ll fly up close and by the time they figure out who we are, it’ll be too late. The warheads will be effective within twenty-five kilometers of the Grey ship. Punch past their shield, arm and drop the bomb. You’ll have thirty seconds to get the hell outta there, or else.”

John raised his eyebrow as he heard Jason’s last sentence. “Thirty seconds? That’s cutting it a little close. And what do you mean? Jason, you’re going on this little suicide mission as well. I don’t think you really want me playing with plasma rings.”

Jason chuckled. “You’re right of course. Thirty seconds because any more time than that, and we run the risk of having our package de-

tected and destroyed before it can deliver its payload. Plus thirty seconds will end up being an eternity when we're actually out there hoping the Grey don't see it and blow it up like they did all the other missiles that the Pentagon directed at it."

"And how do you expect us to get out of there in time without getting blown to bits?" John asked.

Jason laughed to himself again. "I don't expect you to survive that long so I won't bother going over that part. I have the warhead all rigged for remote detonation from the ship. All you guys need to do is get it up there and drop it. If we live past that, we can use the remote engine algorithm to bring whatever is left of the 75 back down to earth if necessary."

At that moment Susan gave Jason a punch in the arm. "We don't need any bad luck on this mission." Susan turned her attention to John. "I believe that escape will require using the Variable Mass Propulsion System."

"The VMP? I thought that hasn't been tested..." John trailed off.

Jason grinned as he felt his arm. "It hasn't been, just like half of the other systems on these birds." He paused briefly. "But I don't see why it won't work. These distortion rings are exact duplicates of the ones found in the wreckage aside from the matter used in the circulation stream. Their emission systems appear to be operating

normally. Hasn't blown up yet, but we've never had to spin them at 250,000 RPM before either."

"In plain English Jason, I went to school for business administration, not quantum mechanics," John said.

"Here's how it works: the fluid inside the plasma rings circulate, within the ship, at high speed resulting in a field that actually reduces the physical mass of the ship. Lot of science behind it, but trust me, it works. Essentially you're making the ship as light as a feather with a powerful positron engine strapped onto it," Jason replied.

"The two SR-74s can't handle the complete engine design in their current state, we'll need to link the three ships within the field to share in near-zero mass effect. Assuming you want to use them in the fight," Susan stated.

John sighed, "Suicide mission requires suicide plan I suppose. Well worse case, we can always kick it up to full speed without the VMP drive and hope that the reinforced armor plating gives us some protection, right?"

Susan shook her head. "Sorry to give you the bad news, but spinning the rings that fast will require a great deal of power. The plasma will already be in motion, it will be unlikely that propulsion alone will have enough force to get you out of there in time. You will simply be too heavy for the thrusters to be of any benefit in this plan."

“Since the 75 is the only ship capable of generating a field strong enough to lighten the load, the 74s will need to dock with either side of the ship while at maximum spin as well themselves,” Jason stated.

“However, if the 74s cannot make the attachment, they can reduce as much weight as they can and fire up their nuclear engines. This would be dangerous, and I would not recommend it. They likely will not be able to escape a blast of this size on their own power. Either way, getting the ships back safely relies on the 75,” Susan added.

John paused and thought deeply. “That’s a lot riding on the success of an untested prototype isn’t it?”

Susan smiled. “I guess we’ll just have to hope that Jason here managed to build the thing properly.”

Jason rolled his eyes. “Yeah right, enough talking about how we’re all going to die. We need to go over the final checklist for the fleet.”

“First time I’ve ever heard of three ships being called a fleet,” John said sarcastically.

Susan pondered the idea for a moment. “Well since we’re all going to be famous after we return...” She laughed to herself. “We might as well have a name. How about we call it Susan’s Fleet?”

“And people in hell want ice water. No, we need something strange, semi-mysterious be-

cause, the *Graviton Heavy Industries Fleet* doesn't sound very heroic," Jason replied.

"It doesn't matter what we name it, it's the mission that is the most important," John said.

Susan nodded her head in agreement. "If we survive the mission, it will be one hell of a party waiting for us. That's something we can all agree on."

The group of three nodded to each other, and the pre-launch checklist began. Jason hummed to himself as he reviewed the fleet. The prototype ships themselves were the pinnacle of space based technology for humans and Jason wanted to ensure that they would operate flawlessly, and most importantly, bring back their crews safely. The SR-75 was easily the largest of the three ships, and had only recently been completed with the addition of a design based on the alien power source. Jason and his crew still did not entirely know how the technology worked, but just that it did. That was the important thing. The SR-75 was so large, that any conventional propulsion system would be unlikely to even move the massive ship more than a foot. Jason smiled as he ran down the checklist without a single problem, a rare treat. He tried to keep his mind focused, as he knew that these ships would be the only thing separating them from the cold depths of space as well as the Grey's superior firepower.

John paced around the assembly deck, making separate inspections of all three prototypes. They were impressive to say the least. Each appeared to have been freshly painted in black, similar to that of a stealth fighter. The engines would likely glimmer in the darkness of space, surely a beautiful sight to behold. John watched as the last of the supplies were loaded onboard the ships, and the various crews of the ships began to file into the assembly deck. Although this was a volunteer mission, most of his team had shown, ready to give they're all. John was proud, proud of his company, and proud of the human nature's call to persevere and never give up. If they were to die, John wanted to go out fighting, rather than leave his fate to the untold tomorrow. The mission crews boarded their respective ships, and the ground personnel evacuated the decks and disappeared into the communication and control rooms.

The mountain complex rumbled as the three Graviton vessels activated their power sources, which then finally stabilized to a steady hum. Massive titanium doors, complete with fake foliage to hide the complex from the outside world, opened as the ships' plasma acceleration rings began to circulate. Each of the three ships rose off the ground holding a stationary position mere inches from the deck plating.

John had taken his position onboard the command deck of the SR-75. The ship was so

large that its cockpit was actually a medium sized room filled with consoles, controls and displays. He adjusted his headset's earpiece and microphone as he spoke.

"SR-75 to GHI control, requesting status of launch vector over," John said.

"External doors open. Launch vector shows clear. Status lights are green. Launch is a go," a voice responded.

"Roger control." John nodded confirmation to Jason who sat in a chair not far from him.

Jason read his console displays. "Engines are hot, 74s confirm launch status. All systems are green. On your mark, John."

"Let's roll."

Jason pressed forward a set of levers, which activated the SR-75's maneuvering thruster units. The ship moved slowly at first then quickly gained speed as it accelerated from the hidden underground base. The ship's gravitized floor plating seemed to vibrate as the plasma inside the rings continued to spin ever faster. Behind them, the two SR-74 models closely followed. The three ships continued to gain speed and altitude as they entered a triangle formation at a forty-five degree angle. Soon the atmosphere had completely disappeared, giving way to nothing but dark, empty space.

John flipped a switch on his control panel, which quickly released the ship's recessed cannons and missile launchers from beneath the

hull. The battle with the Grey was about to begin.

Chapter three

Council Chambers of the High Order
Mt. Krar, Varren
Imperium Central Administrative Capital

The architectural wonder of Mt. Krar was magnificent, unlike anything to be expected of the species. The Imperium had always decimated and destroyed the large majority of the planets that it conquered, but its capital was a glorious monument to the supremacy of the race. The city itself sat atop Mount Krar, a lone mountain whose summit had been slowly flattened to accommodate the ever-increasing capital structures. Krar was a natural fortress, surrounded on all sides by vertical rock faces, with access largely limited to vehicles. While the capital could be easily seen from many units away, it could also be defended at a moment's notice. The city structures towered high into the sky and seemed to scratch at space itself. It was from the largest tower that the Imperial High Order ruled its empire and brought death and destruction onto so many others.

Aturos paced about his chambers as he pondered the current situation carefully. He was one

of five Imperium Overlords. From their chambers, towering high over the capital city, they directed Imperium ships, their subordinates, and the fate of countless other alien races. Aturos had, once again, lost in the latest vote of the High Order: the conquest of yet another planet. This one had been marked as H-551. Each Overlord possessed five votes to use for any side of the argument they chose, or both. The conquest of H-551 passed sixteen to nine. Aturos pondered the idea of where the other four votes had come from. Perhaps the other Overlords felt a slight sense of guilt as they always claimed or perhaps one of the others could be persuaded.

The Overlord left his chambers and rode the gravity lift down to the bottom of the Tower of the High Order. As he exited the building onto the highly secure capital grounds, he stopped and took in the view, as he always did. The empire, so vast, was becoming increasingly harder to control. Many conquered species had risen against the Imperium. Without the latest addition of the neural regulator, far more would be rising against them each day. But the regulator had its flaws and some were immune to its effects. The planet H-544 had been easily conquered recently, no doubt why the other Overlords were so eager to see 551 fall as well. The two planets were located in the same star system. Aturos paused and made a calculated risk. He was never in favor of the Imperium conquer-

ing more systems. They had long overreached their forces and maintaining order within the Imperium's boundaries was becoming increasingly difficult. But this had always been the way of Empire: conquer and continually expand or become stagnant and collapse upon itself.

The Imperium was a vast space empire that stretched for countless light years across the galaxy and stood unopposed in power and might. Aturos was proud of his empire, what he had help build, and what he was watching crumble before him. Each species they conquered became increasingly harder to control as the Empire's reach extended. And within the Empire, there were always those who would seek to better themselves at the expense of others. The Empire would be a victim of its own success if proper order was not restored to those blinded by the Imperium's glory.

Aturos surveyed the surrounding buildings and finally spoke into his transmitter. The tachyon-based transmitter relayed his orders directly to Aturos' imperial flagship, currently orbiting high above the capital.

"Prepare for departure," Aturos ordered, "I am going to review the glorious conquests of H-544 myself."

"Yes, Overlord," the flagship's Ship Master responded.

A few hours later...

The *Supremacy* slowed as it approached the planet marked as H-544. The massive ship was bristling with cannons and other heavy weapon emplacements, along with the standard imperial arsenal capable of destroying an entire sector in days. The Imperium's heavy weapons could easily rip through an enemy, provided the target was travelling slowly enough. Capital ship weapons were usually better suited for orbital bombardment, though, relying upon escort ships to provide defenses during space engagements. The flagship cut its engines as it approached the other Imperium ships already in orbit near the planet. The *Supremacy* transmitted an authorization code sequence and verified its identity, as well as its passengers on-board, immediately confirming their flagship status.

"Status," Aturos demanded of the *Supremacy's* Ship Master.

The usually controlling and belligerent Ship Master was humbled in the presence of one of the highest ranks in the empire. "Imperium forces have 72% control of H-544. Additional forces have been deployed to H-551," the Ship Master replied. After a brief pause, he added, "Under direction from the High Order. They departed quite some time ago, given the time required for *Supremacy* to arrive."

Aturos looked out through the heavy windows of the *Supremacy* and stared into the vastness of space. He saw nothing, a reminder of one of the Imperium's core tenants. *Out of nothing, the Imperium had risen.* Aturos shook the unsettling feeling and turned his attention to the planet and its orbiting moons. The planet before him seemed completely barren. This puzzled Aturos and he finally asked, "Is there nothing upon the planet itself?"

The Ship Master thought about the question for a second and then glanced at a monitor. "Negative, the planet does not support any type of biosphere. It does however produce a great deal of energy. One of the moons did have an alien presence." The Ship Master paused. "Now they are under the Imperium's control."

Aturos glanced at the Ship Master, and quickly reviewed him. The Ship Master certainly did have a taste for power. Undoubtedly this was reason for his commander status aboard an Imperium flagship. Aturos nodded with approval. "Of course they are. However, there still remains 28% of the inhabitants. This is unacceptable. See to it that you resolve this immediately. You are dismissed."

Aturos watched the Ship Master as he prepared more fighters to investigate and secure the last remaining pockets of resistance. Aturos already knew that his efforts were futile, those who did not want to be found would not be

found. He was pleased that the votes of the High Order were never released; therefore his authority on this mission would not dare be challenged. Although it was rare for a member of the High Order to personally oversee a mission, it was not unheard of, especially if there were personal rewards to be reaped. The Ship Master would blindly perform his duty with the expectation that his loyalty would be rewarded generously. The Overlord stared out at the distant stars beyond. He knew that this mission would be unlike anything he had seen before, and of that, he could be sure.

Chapter four

Graviton Vessel SR-75 Earth Orbit

The fleet sped through space as the ship's engines propelled them into the darkness. The heavy consumption of power and the complexity of Variable Mass Propulsion model theories did not make its use an option in the attack. The SR-75 would fire a concentrated anti-proton burst, which would hopefully interfere with the Grey operating systems long enough to render them powerless and defenseless to a quick strike from the three ship fleet. It was a bold plan, but John doubted the Grey had theorized a space attack from a species just past space launches.

"Maintain formation," John ordered as the three-ship fleet came within range of the Grey capital ship. The sleek ships were near invisible to the eye due to their stealth-like design, but the Grey could still detect them if they were actively scanning. The Grey command ship loomed in the distance growing nearer as the fleet prepared to make its attack.

“Prepare to fire two high yield particle bursts,” John ordered as he made another check over the monitors.

The Grey command ship was becoming larger by the second.

“We’re ready, awaiting the order,” Jason responded.

“Fire!” John ordered.

The SR-75’s forward cannons answered the order as two anti-proton bursts sped through the darkness and impacted directly into the side of the Grey command ship. The unique properties of the particle’s interaction with solid matter allowed them to almost immediately spread throughout the Grey network. The ship shuddered as its primary power network began to overload and its system began to fail.

“Direct hit, Grey systems are failing, the bubble deflector is down,” Jason yelled.

John scanned ahead as he saw the chaos unfolding. “All ships break formation and accelerate to full attack speed. Engage at will. Jason, ready the warhead.”

The three ships blasted through space, their mounted particle cannons firing burst after burst along with the missile launchers spraying heavy fire over the Grey ship. The two 74s blasted apart the Grey launch bays, while the 75 came around to deliver the warhead. The Grey command ship struggled to restore its deflector as the newly developed Graviton particle weapons

were slowly crippling it from the outside in. The other Grey craft that were already outside of the hangers became non-functional, as they relied heavily on the command ship for most of their flight data and power.

Jason watched the scanners and quickly saw the level of energy emissions begin to decrease. "Our effect is rapidly dissipating; they'll be operational in less than thirty seconds."

John cursed, "Can we fire another shot from the primary cannon?"

"Negative, we'll need the power for the engines." Jason replied.

"So much for the increased power efficiency. Get ready to drop the warhead and prepare the engines for a quick escape. Start getting those rings up to speed, Jason."

Jason paused and pushed several buttons. "Ready when you are, I'm calling back the 74s, and then we'll be ready to blow this party."

John nodded and began to bring the ship back around. The ship lurched ahead as John fed power to the engines and then quickly decelerated directly next to the Grey ship's outer hull.

"We're in position, deploy it now!" John yelled.

Jason quickly pushed another button and the warhead was released from the SR-75's lower cargo hold; it began to drift into space, its detonation timer activating in event remote detonation should fail.

“Go, go, go!” John yelled.

Jason pushed the engines to maximum and the SR-75 tore away from the Grey capital ship, preparing to meet up with the 74s. The ship slowed and then maneuvered into formation between the 74s at which time John signalled Jason. Each of the 74s then magnetically locked to either side of the larger ship, followed by a set of clamp which secured the connection.

“Grey ship has re-established their deflectors, it’ll be one hell of a bang,” John heard one of the crewmembers aboard the SR-74 comment.

Jason continued to fiddle with the controls until they were perfectly set. “Initiating the gravitomagnetic field now, everybody hold onto something,”

Watching one of the aft monitors, John watched the cannons on the Grey ship glow red, preparing to fire a volley of energy at them. Blue light began to emanate from the SR-75 as the acceleration rings spun faster and faster. Without hesitation, John threw full power to the engines once the mass of the ship was reduced to appropriate levels. The fleet appeared to have vanished as it sped away at high velocity. Behind it, the nuclear warhead exploded and a massive fireball engulfed the Grey capital ship. The Grey’s deflectors contained the majority of the explosion until finally the capital ship’s outer hull disintegrated. As the explosion consumed the massive alien ship, it finally reached the

alien energy source, that ignited and exploded, causing a massive burst of particles to be emitted into all directions.

“What the hell?!” Jason screamed as his monitor shouted warnings. “Energy levels are off the charts, we’re losing stability on the--”

Jason was cut short as he watched as one of the SR-74s beside them suddenly break off to be left behind and caught in the all-consuming explosion. The screams of those aboard the detached ship were only to be heard in slow motion a few moments later due to the time dilation effect that resulted from the velocity in which the remaining ships were travelling. The Grey command ship had completely vanished from the sensors, as it was consumed in the awe-inspiring shockwave. The alien power source had nearly tripled the size of what the explosion would have been on Earth, where people witnessed the ultimate fireworks display.

Chapter five

The two Graviton vessels travelled for nearly four minutes after their latest encounter with the Grey. The silence aboard the ships was unnerving, but the crews had nothing to say. What they had witnessed was both amazing and horrific. They had successfully taken the fight to the Greys and they had been victorious. But with all victories, it came with a high price. One of the SR-74s had detached, and was consumed in the massive explosion that followed the destruction of the Grey ship; the first of many more casualties to come.

The SR-75 & 74 both shuddered as they instantly slowed to a crawl. In just a few short minutes, they had travelled nearly six million miles away from Earth.

“Where the hell are we?” John asked.

“In the darkness of space, nearly six million miles away from home,” Jason answered. “Hold on, incoming transmission from Susan aboard the 74. On speaker.”

“We don't seem to be in the neighbourhood of Earth anymore, in fact if I had to guess I would have to say we were closer to the planet

Mars. Of course, I suppose it was our only option to avoid that fiery consumption,” she said.

Jason looked at the display monitors, and then replied with excitement, “It looks like we reached a top speed of 50,000 miles per second before the plasma flow slowed, and that was for just a four minute jump. I’m willing to bet that we can triple that velocity given enough acceleration!”

“I see, well we are heavily damaged from that last shot we took, request linkup and transfer of crew and supplies” she said.

John scanned the monitor displaying the SR-74. The heavily damaged ship was in danger of ripping apart if it attempted another jump, but the ship was also too valuable to be left adrift.

“Maintain the link and open the docking doors,” John said. “Then we’ll absorb as much power as we can from the 74s reactor, and we’ll try another jump back. We’ll put the 74 on auto pilot and have her come back on conventional thrust.”

“Roger that. *Relinquent* out.” Susan said and then the speakers went silent.

“*Relinquent*? Already naming ships is she? I suppose we’ll need to for the party back on Earth. That’s assuming they survived the massive explosion and the planet isn’t covered with radiation poisoning,” Jason said sarcastically.

John sighed as he sunk into his chair. “Always the optimist Jason. Start focusing on get-

ting us back...oh and, try not to have such a heavy foot this time around, I think rush hour is over.” After a few minutes John silently rose out of his chair and went to find a place think and rest.

John awoke to find himself in the crew section of the SR-75. The compartments that made up this section were modest and mostly bare. Few of the crew had bothered to bring anything along in regards to personal items. John jumped down from his top bunk and slipped out into the corridor, slowly making his way back to the command pit.

As John entered the command pit, Jason gave him a nod, and he saw that the *Relinquent's* crew had already transferred aboard. John stopped and stood, looking over the command pit, which truly did resemble a pit in many ways. The actual flight controls and monitors, as well as the navigation system were all sunk down in the center of the room. Behind and above these controls were the weapon systems, engines and acceleration ring monitoring stations. Moreover, located in the very front of the room lay the most amazing view of space. John stared out through the heavily reinforced material and took in the view of the stars as the heads-up display pulsed green. He paused and wondered how stable the window was, and if it made for a large target from the outside of the ship. John pushed the thought away and turned to find Jason.

“What’s our status now?” John asked.

“We have over a dozen injured, and three dead. The crew of the *Relinquent* have all boarded and Susan is in the infirmary right now helping out with first aid.” Jason paused and then added, “All hands aboard the other SR-74 perished. Thirty-four in all, I’m sad to say.”

John shook his head. Those deaths he probably could have been prevented. John cursed himself and wondered if there was just one more thing, one little calculation that he had overlooked. The deaths of his fellow crew, of his friends, were upon him. Jason saw this and immediately countered.

“John there was no way we could have compensated. I’ve already looked at the logs. They lost their Gravitomagnetic field; a break in one of the copper alloy’s rings was most likely the cause. It’s a miracle that we all managed to survive. In fact, they probably detached from us intentionally so that the rest of us could escape without risk. If it’s anyone’s fault, its those damn Grey bastards. They should be the ones who will pay,” Jason said.

John slowly nodded, but he still couldn’t shake the feeling of regret. But Jason was right, the Grey were going to pay for what they had done if they should ever return.

“So what’s our operating status?” John asked.

Jason walked over to one of the command pit's monitoring stations. He turned back and said to John, "Repairs to the reactors have been completed since you've been napping, but long range communication has been completely knocked out. We'll have to make full repairs upon returning. We should be space worthy to make another jump as soon as the capacitors reach full power."

John smiled, "Well, at least we're still in one piece. I wish we had our communication system to relay a message, but I guess we'll have to keep the people in suspense until our triumphant return... assuming we make it back."

Jason nodded then began to make his way towards the positron fusion reactor to make another check of the power systems. John took another look out in space, and then pulled himself away to check the patients in the infirmary. As he walked through the vessel, he was congratulated by his fellow crewmembers on his heroic actions in the battle. John was flattered, but did not feel worthy of the praise he was receiving.

The sterile door of the small infirmary slid open and John entered to find the room lined with cots and beds, almost all occupied. Along the wall were black body bags which he suspected were waiting to be used. He saw several of the crewmates acting as doctors and nurses, attempting to comfort the injured. John saw Susan in one of the corners attending to a man

who had heavy burns all over his body. Susan waved him over, and John walked over to the bed and examined the man.

Susan watched a nearby heart monitor then said to John, "Joseph Long. Heavy burns over his body. Had the bad misfortune of taking an explosion near the bloody reactor head on. He'll be fine though. All the injuries here are treatable. Just needs some time and much needed rest. He's one of the worst, but at least he is alive."

John stared down at the man, his eyes were closed and he had entered into a deep sleep. John took another look around the infirmary. "We're lucky that we're all not dead. Jason said that had our luck failed, we would have been caught in the explosion as well."

"You mean the crew of the *Valiant*?" Susan paused. "That's what I've named the other 74, the one we lost. I've also taken the liberty of naming this ship as well. The *Excalibur*. What do you think?" she asked.

John quickly recalled the legendary story. "The mythical sword of the legendary King Arthur. I think it suits the ship. Well, I came here to notify you that the *Excalibur* will be leaving as soon as the fuel cells have charged."

Susan nodded as she turned to look out of a small porthole into space. "I don't like fighting this war. It's wrong, we shouldn't be the ones out here risking it all when we could have had warning and the government could have

stopped it. But now, there is no government. What future do we have to return to? Just piles of rubble. I suppose I'm taking all this the wrong way, but I still feel betrayed."

John knew exactly how she felt. The government had known about the Grey, they had just underestimated the timing and strength of the attack. He thought about his wife and daughter, and then replied, "Well Susan, when we get back to earth, I'm sure you'll have plenty of time to draft the constitution of the United Earth organization..."

John chuckled to himself at the thought, but then realized the truth in his statement. Organized government no longer existed. John pondered the idea when Jason's voice came over the ship's speakers. "Everybody get strapped in and hold on tight, we're heading home!"

Chapter six

Lunar Orbit
Hostile-544, Outer-Rim Sol System

The heavily armed ship drifted in space, caught in the moon's orbit. The engines had been powered down, and the weapons taken off-line. The ship was simply drifting in space, thus concealing any of its real intentions. The sensor network continually swept the planet and its moons, and immediately registered the huge signature that had appeared. Given the size and outline of the sensor mass, the class of ship was almost unmistakable: another Imperium fleet flagship.

The Ship Master approached the Overlord who seemed to never leave the bridge.

"Excuse me Overlord, I must inform you that Lord Zyron's flagship has entered sensor range and is on an approach vector," the Ship Master informed him.

"Dear Lord Zyron," the Overlord said. "Send him greetings on my behalf and find out what he is doing here at once."

The Ship Master quickly nodded and walked away towards the communication terminal as

Aturos cursed to himself. What was Overlord Zyron doing here? It was dangerous enough for him to be here, but to have two flagships of the Imperium here was simply unthinkable. Now the situation would become more complex, but first Aturos needed to find why Zyron had graced him with his presence.

As the Overlord appeared to be deep in thought, one of the *Supremacy's* ship attendants noticed a new contact on the sensor network. An Imperium craft. He went to tell the Overlord in the absence of his Ship Master.

"My Lord..." the ship attendant began as he approached Aturos.

"What is it attendant?" Aturos replied plainly.

"I have an Imperium bombardment craft on sensor. It appears to have been damaged by an external explosion, but its communications appears to be functional. It has not attempted to contact us as of yet sir."

"Back to your station attendant. Contact the craft. Bring up its registry and fleet deployment identification. And find out what happened."

"Of course my Lord," the attendant responded obediently.

The ship attendant quietly returned to his station and brought up the craft's registry and deployment information. He signalled the Overlord who walked over to view the data.

“Assigned to the Planetary Invasion Fleet, to deployment ID H-551. Acting on the orders of Overlord Zyron sir,” the attendant said meekly.

“Zyron,” Aturos hissed. He looked back at the station monitor. “What’s that?” Aturos said as he motioned to the sensor reading.

The attendant looked at the sensor reading, which showed the craft’s plotted navigation course.

“That is a rendezvous course with Lord Zyron’s flagship sir.”

Aturos stared blankly at the monitor. Indeed the situation had become even worse than he had expected. The invasion fleet acting under the orders of the Overlord Zyron was already underway. Even worse, Zyron was here in person to oversee the invasion. Aturos pondered his options, but he doubted it would resolve anything now. He had made his decision.

“Signal Zyron. Inform him that I want a private meeting with him, now.”

A heavily armored transport shuttle docked inside one of the *Incurative’s* hangers, as its escort ships remained hovering just inside the shield matrix of the Imperium flagship. Aturos exited the ship and was greeted by one of the *Incurative’s* Ship Masters. He was taken towards the bridge, then to Zyron’s personal work area. Aturos knew where he was going, the layout and design was nearly identical to the *Supremacy*. The Ship Master gave him a small bow as

the door to Zyron's chambers slid open and Aturos walked inside to find Zyron sitting patiently. The door quickly sealed, leaving the two Overlords of the Imperium left to discuss.

"For what reason am I graced with your presence?" Aturos questioned.

"The advance of the Invasion Fleet," Zyron replied plainly. "So upon what authority have you entered the combat zone?"

"There is nothing prohibiting myself from rallying the Imperium onward toward victory," Aturos replied.

"There is nothing allowing it either," Zyron said.

"So what happened to the bomber, Zyron? You and I both know that was a special operations craft, not bound a command vessel," Aturos asked.

"It experienced an... attack by the hostile forces of H-551. Well not directly attacked, it found itself within a combat zone during an explosion. The pilot has been debriefed and dealt with."

"Executed I would assume," Aturos said as he stared out the window in to space.

"For the good of the Imperium," Zyron replied coldly.

"So I ask again, what happened?" Aturos questioned again.

Zyron paused as he wondered if Aturos was trustworthy with the information of the humans. He slowly began to speak again.

“An unknown group of ships attacked and destroyed an invasion command ship and its escorts.”

“So then, this fleet has not surrendered to the Imperium?” Aturos asked curiously.

Zyron stared blankly at Aturos then said, “We will make sure that these unknown ships, this X-Fleet is quelled and I shall do it where they shall not think to look twice. They will be dealt with.”

Aturos was surprised in the Overlord’s response. He nodded slowly then replied, “Whatever satisfies your conquest Zyron.”

“*Where they shall not think to look...*” the Overlord pondered as he returned to the *Supremacy* in the ferry shuttle craft. Aturos activated his transponder and contacted the Ship Master on duty. Aturos carefully thought about the plan that Zyron was developing deep within his mind. Finally he spoke into the transponder, “Bring up all available controls on H-551, and have them ready upon my return.”

Chapter seven

**Washington D.C.
United States, Earth**

The sky burned orange as ash and debris continued to rain down and burn in the atmosphere after the nuclear explosion. A small stage had been erected and several rows of chairs had been placed directly in front of the stage. In the rear, an ABC news truck was parked, as an NBC news truck also pulled in to begin live broadcasting. Only recently had their electrical systems been restored, after being knocked out by the electromagnetic pulse emitted by the explosion. Four Graviton Heavy Industries corporate helicopters and a fleet of military choppers approaching and touching down on the designated landing areas broke the silence of the early morning.

John, Jason, and Susan, plus several others exited one of the lead GHI helicopters as their fellow crewmates of the Graviton fleet exited from the others. The air still smelled of smoke and ash, but with each passing day it was slowly dissipating. John watched as a group of Marines, equipped with rifles, immediately took up guard

positions. More helicopters began to land as the remaining leaders of the United States made their first public appearances since the incident. Most importantly, among them was acting President, former Secretary of Defense, Archer.

"You know it was awfully nice of the Secretary of Defense to do all this for us," John said.

"Of course John, we're heroes now," Jason replied. "I hoped that we would get something, like cash. But then again, the title Secretary of Defense doesn't seem to hold much weight now days," Jason said as he waved one of his arms in the general direction of the remains of the capitol building.

Susan sighed. "One of these days, Jason, that attitude of yours is going to get you shot. But in the meantime, Secretary Archer is one of the few, if not the last, remaining figures of American authority. He and a few other Congressmen. He's just lucky he had to miss the Union Address. Otherwise he would be dead with those others in that crater formally known as the Capitol."

Jason grinned. "Maybe it's a conspiracy and Archer knew that it was going to happen the entire time. He could ha—"

Jason was cut short as Susan punched him in arm yet again. "Hey now, you never know, it could've happened!" Jason said.

"Everybody's already jumpy enough as it is, we don't need to start a panic," Susan said as she moved towards the rows of chairs being set up.

John was silent as they walked towards the stage and the seats surrounding the podium. The trio sat down in the front row, as everyone else took seats behind or stood up in the rear. He thought about what Jason had said, about a conspiracy. The government had already known about the Grey, the remaining intact intelligence files proved that. There was no telling how much else they knew. John pushed the idea aside, there were bigger concerns. This first fight with the Grey was not to be the last in his own mind.

John watched as the ceremony of recognition and awards began. Each crewman of the ships was awarded with medals and honor by Secretary of Defense Archer. Others received lower honors from Archer for their actions or assistance during the crisis. Following the destruction of the capital, and in keeping with the order of succession, Archer was in effect the President of the United States. John watched as his commanders each received the Medal of Freedom, the highest honor that could be awarded to a civilian. Most were very enthusiastic, and John was glad. So far the entire war with the Grey had been nothing but sorrow and defeat. Now they were free, for the time being. Susan appeared to be cranking impeachment documents in her mind regarding the technicalities of Presidential Medals from an Acting President.

Following the ceremony, John was asked to make his speech on live television. John approached the podium, adjusted the microphone, and cleared his throat to begin.

“We have already been through so much. The nation, the world has been shaken to the very foundation of its order. This victory will end only the immediate threat, not the war to come. I quote Prime Minister Winston Churchill in saying ‘I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.’ The fighting will probably never end, but as long as I can draw breath, we shall not fail. Thank you.”

John nodded to the crowd and to the cameras, then stepped down from the stage as the crowd exploded into cheers and applause. Secretary Archer continued to applaud as he stepped up behind the podium and calmed down the crowd. The short man looked more like a politician than a military man. He dressed in a dark blue suit with an American flag tie and pin. His hair was brown and his blue eyes looked eagerly through the crowd as he began to speak.

“Thank you Mr. Stone. I thank you, the American people thank you, and I believe the world thanks you as well. I would like to formally offer the Graviton Fleet a position within the United States Armed Forces as the last action I make as the Secretary of Defense. After this I shall be officially sworn in to the office of President. I doubt that this victory shall spell an end

to the war, but rest assured, the Grey can expect that the United States of America, no, the world, shall not –”

Suddenly the back of Archer’s head exploded and almost immediately he fell to the floor of the stage. Instantly the Secret Service rushed in to attempt to shield the Secretary as their sub-machine guns and government issued Glock handguns materialized into their hands. John’s mouth fell open as the realization dawned on him from what he had witnessed: An assassination.

Chaos took hold as the Graviton employees started to scatter and the screaming began with the panic that ensued. The Secret Service moved quickly and threw the Secretary into one of the armored SUVs it had on standby. John heard the engine roar to life and watched it retreat at top speed. John was still in a confused state when Susan grabbed his arm and yelled at him, just to be heard over the chaos.

“We’ve got to get out of here!”

They were cut short as some armed marines grabbed John and several other Graviton executives and ushered them into an HMX-1 Marine helicopter. The door was sealed and the helicopter roared to quickly lifting off the ground. Within thirty seconds it was speeding away from the panic. John was relieved this helicopter was much quieter than his company's and he didn’t need headphones to communicate with

the others. Then John noticed something he hadn't seen before, as he was stuffed inside the helicopter. The Great Seal of the President of the United States was embroidered upon the seat directly across from him. They were in one of the Presidential helicopters.

John closed his eyes as he quickly reviewed all that had happened in less than two minutes. His heart was still racing as the adrenaline in his system began to dissipate. He wondered why the Secretary was thrown into an SUV, when they had the fleet of Marine helicopters at the standby. Perhaps a medic or doctor was in the car, but John couldn't be sure. He opened his eyes and looked across at Susan who seemed to know just what he was thinking.

"Maybe we're more valuable to the government now. That or the Secret Service and the Marines knew the President was already dead." Susan said.

"Why do you say that?" John replied.

"No reason...Graviton Company Headquarters should have been recording those live feeds of the ceremony. It was being broadcast, so maybe we'll be able to find out more." Susan responded.

John nodded. He didn't feel as though he were in shock, and he could already feel the adrenaline disappearing from his system. He felt no sympathy for the Secretary, but the full implications had yet to dawn upon him. He could

only reply, “It depends upon where the Corps intends to drop us off now doesn’t it?”

Chapter eight

**Kennedy Space Center, Florida
United States, Earth**

Illuminated by the breaking dawn, the still and silent landscape was disrupted by three armor-plated sport utility vehicles rolling to a stop in front of the Kennedy Space Center. After receiving security clearance at the manned checkpoint, the vehicles drove through the security gate and continued towards the executive compound at the center. The driver, clothed in a black suit, which concealed his firearms, stepped out of the dually escorted vehicle and noticed an army officer and his soldiers approaching. He opened the rear door of the car and John, Susan, and Jason eagerly climbed out, only to be greeted with a cold stare from a United States Army Lieutenant Colonel. The officer gave a crisp salute, and then introduced himself.

“Lieutenant Colonel Wright. I have orders to escort you inside. Follow me,” Wright said.

The Colonel turned in a precise, military-like fashion and walked toward the building as the three confused Graviton employees began to fol-

low. Susan noticed how the soldiers held their firearms. They were tense and obviously had no idea what was to be expected. The group and its escorts walked through the lobby of the KSC Headquarters building and through a maze of hallways and corridors. They finally stopped outside a set of double doors. The Colonel nodded at the door then signalled to his soldiers and they retreated back the way they had come. John shot a glance at Jason, who shrugged, as Susan pushed open the door.

The door, which was made of solid oak and bore a beautifully embossed seal of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, swung open easily as John walked through. Inside, John found himself in a large conference room with a large, dark, wooden table in the middle, with three men watching a flat screen television set into the far wall. The three men stood and turned toward them, as the Graviton group entered. They looked to be in surprisingly good spirits. Administrator Rikker approached John and held out his hand.

“Mr. Stone, it is a pleasure to meet you in person, I have seen a lot of your work in the news lately,” the man began.

“I wouldn’t know anything about that Mr. Rikker. As you probably know, I’ve been recently transported in a prototype combat ship, Marine helicopter, military plane, and armored

car, with absolutely no time to catch up on the news,” John replied.

“I can’t believe a flight in a US Army plane could have been that bad, though in light of recent events, your presence here was necessary. Please sit down.”

Rikker motioned toward a chair at the conference table, which John looked at apprehensively. A moment later he sat down as Jason and Susan followed suit beside him. Rikker smiled, and then sat on the opposite side of the table. Only one of Rikker’s associates sat down. The other walked towards the door.

“If you’ll excuse me, Administrator, I have business to attend to,” the man said with a slight nod. He opened the door and exited. As John looked out he could see what looked like a Marine and another Secret Service agent.

“Only a slight precaution Mr. Stone,” Rikker said as he motioned towards the door as it closed.

“Mr. Stone is my father’s name. Please, call me John,” he replied.

Rikker began to speak “Very well. And I’m Ed. Now, I’ll not waste any more of your time. As I’m sure you all know, Secretary Archer has been assassinated –”

“No kidding,” Jason said sarcastically.

“Alright Mr. Jones, we have no need for your smart-ass commentary. We all know what you are capable of and I still have your NASA appli-

cation in our rejected applicant files,” Rikker fired back.

Jason leaned back in his chair and stared silently towards the wall, face flushed in embarrassment.

“Now, as I was saying. Secretary Archer has been confirmed dead. It's all over the news. However, information not released in the news is that U.S. Army doctors found the remains of a small implant...” Rikker said.

“Implant?” Susan asked.

“Grey,” Rikker responded silently.

John tried to put the pieces together in his mind, but it didn't make any sense. The Grey had control of the government...but then had killed their puppet. Or someone else had done the killing. Either way it didn't add up.

“So I assume we were in no real danger?” John questioned.

Rikker paused and remembered watching Archer fall to the ground, then responded, “None, the medical experts believe that the implant initiated a self destruct sequence inside Archer's brain. Unless the Grey packed that implant with C4 explosives, I don't believe anyone was in any real danger. Archer died instantly.”

“Why?” John said immediately.

Rikker stared at him briefly, then spoke, “Why what? Does it even matter the why's of our current situation? We are under alien attack and you want to know why?”

Jason seemed to lose it at that moment and began yelling at Rikker. "You knew the Grey existed! You knew they were coming! You had the answers! Instead you let countless innocent people die a meaningless death!"

This time, the response came from Rikker's seemingly cool-headed associate.

"And just what would you have had us do? Start a mass panic and ensure the end of all organized authority, as we know it? We did all we could, and the company that you work for was part of that equation. You know, maybe it was better for some to be sacrificed, than for the entire world to have perished in chaos. We didn't have all the answers. We sure as hell tried, but damn Congress always shut us out of the necessary funding! 'The US Air Force and Navy will protect us...' That's what they always said. And you know what they did? They had us bomb an apparent abandoned base on the dark side of the Moon, even though we knew *that* was a stupid idea. Hell, for all we know that's what pissed these aliens off! Now the Armed Forces are powerless, and the Pentagon is useless, it's nothing but rubble now. Those ignorant son's-a-bitches on the Hill are all dead, and *they* rightly deserve it!" Rikker's associate screamed at Jason.

An eerie silence filled the room as the man's word set in. John remembered when we sent a missile to the moon; it was supposed to have been a scientific experiment to search for water.

He also recalled a supposed interview with Neil Armstrong that claimed they were warned off the moon by extra terrestrials, but that statement was written off as the crazy ramblings of senility; he was 80 at the time.

John stared blankly at the table as he brushed these thoughts off as mere conspiracy theories; it felt like an eternity before Rikker spoke.

“Anyway John, we'd like to offer you a proposition.” Rikker said.

Chapter nine

The turrets boomed as they launched heavily concentrated particles of energy. The energy flew through space, entered the atmosphere and collided into the planet, setting off massive explosions as fire began to spread. The life forms scattered in terror while other humans tried to hide. But these were not humans, humanoid in construction, but more evolved. The turrets continued to boom as an entire region was consumed in fire.

Zyron walked along the flagship's bridge, a rather extensive section of the ship dedicated solely to ship wide operations and control. The flagship's turrets cooled as the fires spread planet side. The ship had the power to set the entire planet on fire with just one command, but Zyron felt merciful today. He would only deal with a contained rebel region for the time being. Zyron watched disconnectedly as the sensor and optical data confirmed destruction throughout the targeted region. The orbital Armageddon had silenced those who would rebel against the Imperium.

"Prepare a battle cluster," Zyron ordered.

One of the ship masters responded, “It will take time to call the fleet and prepare.”

Zyron slowly nodded. “Very well, the more time to plan the destruction of this X-Fleet and these annoying humanoids.” Zyron waved his hand in disgust and began walking back towards his private chambers.

Earth Orbit

Commander Seth Conceje maneuvered the SR-74 into position as the makeshift tow cables hooked onto the spacecraft. The ship fired its engines and headed back into the atmosphere. After a short turbulent ride, the SR-74 touched down on what appeared to be an abandoned helicopter landing pad. The pad shifted as heavy gears began turning, and the pad began to lower into a hidden hanger of Graviton Heavy Industries.

The SR-74’s rear loading ramp unsealed and Seth jumped down from the ship. He stood about six foot, had dirty blond hair and a set of greenish colored eyes. Jason approached the alien ship that had been in tow with the SR-74.

“Got another one. There’s only a few left, I think we’ve got most of them,” Seth said.

Jason nodded. “It’s a good thing that there was a lot of them. Now that I have a real engi-

neering team, I can finally start getting this done, and done on time.”

Seth watched as a group of men wearing white NASA uniforms began going to work on detaching the cables from the alien ship. John had agreed to help the NASA head, and in turn, Rikker offered a great deal of support.

“Good timing,” Seth said as he walked to the side of the Grey ship. He ran his hand over the Grey insignia that was emblazoned upon every Grey ship.

“Amazing we always believed aliens to be highly evolved beings,” Seth said as he lightly punched the insignia. “But I suppose war is something that goes across cultures, and withstands the test of time. We ever figure out what this hull is made out of?” Seth asked.

“What ever it is, its extremely well made. Flexible like aluminium foil, yet as strong as titanium. If you were to fold it in half, it would just instantly restore itself back into the way it was before. Nothing a human could accomplish with our technology, at least not yet. If these things didn’t have maintenance hatches, I doubt we’d ever be able to figure out how these things work.” Jason replied. He looked at his watch for a second then said, “Come on, lets grab a cup of coffee or something. NASA has things under control here.”

Jason and Seth walked away from the ship and made their way past countless aircraft that

were donated from the Air Force and other military bases throughout the U.S. Seth saw some new additions since he had left on the salvage mission including a couple joint strike fighters, a stealth bomber, and some strange looking special operations jets. The two continued walking until they arrived at a break room, stocked with coffee, donuts, and anything else to keep a crew awake. Seth grabbed a cup of coffee as Jason found a sprinkle-covered donut. Seth leaned against one of the countertops as Jason took a seat at a small table.

Seth took a sip of his coffee. He looked around then said, "It really is amazing to fly in space. My parents always told me I would only ever dream of going to the stars. The ship responding to every command, the engines propelling you forward at near light speeds, it's unbelievable. Sure makes the world seem a whole lot smaller."

Jason nodded then, his face turning serious. "Try being shot at, having explosions ripping apart your ship, and watching your crewmen die."

"In war...people die. It's a cold fact that history has proven time and time again," Seth replied.

Jason looked up and said, "Well then, so much for peaceful aliens."

Then the alarms began to ring throughout the complex. It sounded like the early warning

alarm, all project commanders and essential personnel were to report to the briefing room on the double. Jason put his donut on a nearby napkin and Seth left his coffee on the marble countertop as they headed towards the elevators. They rode up to the control level, stepped out and hurried towards the conference room, where they were met by a squad of armed marines.

“Arms out,” one of them ordered.

New procedure?” Seth asked as he raised his arms to the side.

“John’s new partner,” Jason said as the soldier patted both of them down, while another trained his weapon on Jason’s head.

After a sufficient pat down, the soldier stepped aside, nodded at the conference room door and the two gladly stepped inside.

The conference room was filled with about a hundred and twenty people comfortably seated on multiple levels in the shape of a semi-circle. Seth found an open seat on the third level, while Jason found a seat closer towards the front. The quiet chatter stopped as more soldiers entered, all with their weapons at the ready. They flanked a man who wore a casual business suit with a pin of an American flag. He waved them off and found a reserved seat which he promptly sat down in. One of his escorts sat directly next to him, presumably a bodyguard.

John, who sat in a nearby seat, rose and walked behind the podium.

“This room and all your faces are starting to be more and more familiar. I don’t know if that’s a good thing or not,” John paused as a light wave of laughter filled the room. “I won’t sugar coat this announcement, or this mission. The Grey have assembled a fleet and are heading this way. We’ve intercepted several communications with help from our friends in intelligence, though they still haven’t been able to completely decipher the language. We are going to mount a defense and hope for the best. That’s all I can offer. My previous pep talks probably won’t do much good, since you already know what we face, or at least the majority of you do.”

“Ships?” someone shouted.

John looked down, almost depressed, then looked back up. “We’ll we’ve got about 145 planes standing by to combat about 450 craft and 10 capital ships. This will be a fight for our lives. That or the Grey will march all over us. Fight or flight. I say we fight.”

At that moment Rikker rose from his chair. “So your team will lead us?”

Jason turned and looked at Rikker. “Well I can’t speak for everyone here, but I’ll see the Grey in hell before I see them on earth! That is of course, unless you know somebody else with access to an armed starship.”

Rikker smiled as applause and cheers erupted. John stepped down from the podium and wiped his eyes. He looked up at all the

brave soldier and pilots and simple employees who would risk so much. John couldn't help but smile as he began walking towards the door. "It's going to be a long night."

Chapter ten

Hostile-544, Outer-Rim Sol System

The engines roared as the battle cluster accelerated from the formerly hostile planet. Behind, they left an Imperial garrison to ensure the planet's control by Imperium forces. The Imperium fleet entered into a close battle formation surrounding the fleet flagship, the *Incursive*, as they left the gravitational field of H-544. Zyron was in chambers as communication to his flagship was received.

"Speak," Zyron ordered.

Aturos' voice filled Zyron's chamber as he spoke. Static slightly hampered audio acuity.

"Do you think it wise?" the disembodied voice asked.

Zyron answered indifferently, "To invade or to destroy or to further the glorious cause of our Imperium?"

"Perhaps all those things. I think you have come to underestimate the resistance to our Imperium. Few races have destroyed Imperial capital ships," Aturos said.

“Those ships....they pose no threat and we shall overwhelm them in sheer size of force. We will crush them.”

“Zyron, you yourself have spoken that you have no knowledge of who they are, how they fight and how big their fleet actually is.”

Zyron waved his hand in a dismissing gesture despite no one present but himself. “Aturos, when I return I shall give you a full lecture about tactical advantages in numbers.”

“Very well Zyron, but I hope that you do not place too much faith in tactics alone,” Aturos said as he closed the communication.

Aturos walked onto the bridge of *Supremacy* as he surveyed the planet and its moons.

“He is a fool,” Aturos said as he walked towards one of the fleet monitoring stations.

“Sir?” one of the Ship Masters asked.

“It does not matter. Ship Master, recall our ships from the cluster.”

The Ship Master stared plainly at the overlay that showed the fleet’s data. He spoke careful as he said, “Sir, that will greatly weaken the battle cluster and the flagship will lose capable guardians.”

Aturos nodded. “I know that,” he said. “Recall the ships.”

“Yes sir,” the Ship Master responded. Within seconds he had sent the new orders over the communication relay. The real time display beeped as each ship acknowledged the orders.

Four capital ships along with any supporting escorts broke formation from the cluster and slowed to turn about as the remaining six continued onward.

Aturos was pleased. "Let Zyron see 'superior' tactics now."

"Sir?" the Ship Master asked.

"Nothing, nothing at all." Aturos looked at the fleet overlay once more. He pressed a key, changing the fleet monitor to display the enemy. Aturos stared at the enemy ship data, classified under X-Fleet. The monitor rotated through the little available tactical data and ship schematics. Aturos examined the data carefully, then once he was assured by the readings, he issued his order. "Prepare the ship for maneuvering operations. Recall our patrol craft and set a course towards Zeeal. Let Zyron fend for himself..."

* * *

Alarms shrieked as pilots, mechanics, commanders, and other employees scrambled to reach their planes and their stations. The new engines fired up flawlessly as the portable gravity dampeners attached to each of their hauls began to receive power. The ships and modified planes began to free themselves from the gravitational fields of the earth. Technology that had once been used to bring terror to earth, would

now be used as the spear point against the Grey terror that was approaching earth once again.

John ran through the various hanger bays, armories, and fuel sections until he finally reached the large hanger where the SR-75 was already undergoing pre-flight checks. The alarms continued to ring as someone spoke through the intercom system, "All personnel to combat craft. This is not a drill." John quickly boarded the 75 through its rear ramp and walked through the elaborate ship's design until he reached the command pit. John was in a pair of military fatigues that the Marines had given out to all of the combat personnel from Graviton. The 75's Internal Communications System, ICS, snapped on and John heard Susan's voice.

"Commander?"

"Yeah I'm here," John said.

"Sorry for short notice, just received word," Susan said.

"We all expected it; we just weren't sure when."

"The Hubble has detected multiple incoming signatures coming off of Jupiter. I doubt if we even have an hour before they breach the Mars perimeter."

John looked surprised. "What? How fast are they going?"

"It's impossible to tell, around 10,000 mps, maybe. Perhaps they don't want to risk getting to earth with a lot of power drained. I really

don't know beyond that," she said. "We are unable to get an exact number of ships, but the good news is we seem to have overestimated the numbers a bit."

"Right, start getting takeoff plans and rendezvous coordinates ready. We'll get the birds in the air, and then we'll regroup for a defense plan. Understand?"

"Yes sir."

"Good, Stone out," John said as the ICS closed the communication line.

John searched out the fleet monitor in the command pit. He glanced at the overall tactical firepower the fleet could produce. "ICS?" John said.

"Yes sir?" the automated computer voice answered.

"Locate and enable communication with an engineer by the name of J. Jones"

"Searching...Comm link enabled," the voice said.

"Jason?" John asked.

"Yeah?"

"How many planes do we have ready for combat duty at this moment?"

"I've got 115 fitted with the positron engines, portable rings and particle cannons. I might be able to get another twenty or so if we can keep working. I've got six ground crews working non-stop already. We're doing this as fast as we can. I've already had all the larger ships includ-

ing the re-modified SR-72 and 73 models loaded with nuclear warheads. Hopefully the same tactic works twice. The VMPs on the modified planes are pretty small and they have limited range communications equipment onboard. I wouldn't push them too far out if we could help it." Jason said.

"I understand, and good work Jason, keep it up."

"Thanks John, I mean sir."

"Stone out," John said as the ICS cut the communication line. "Now let's just hope luck is on our side one more time."

Chapter eleven

H-544, Sol System Outer Rim Ruined Aztec City

The once pinkish skies were filled with the light green haze being emitted by a number of Grey fighters that were destroyed by the planet's defenses. The ground was completely covered in debris left from what remained of this world's largest capital city. The magnificent race that once dominated this place had become pawns of the Imperium. Disregarding the Grey designation, it was once known as Nibiru, a moon in a tidal locked rotation around a large gas giant over five times the size of Jupiter, just inside of the Star System's Heliosphere.

Deep within its ruins, in an underground bunker, a group of hairless humanoids had taken refuge moments before the invasion began. "Sounds like the bombing has stopped, it might be safe to go back out now," said a woman as she gazed at the ceiling with a small boy child in her arms. The resemblance between the two clearly showed a mother-child relation, the same oval blue-green eyes and well rounded ears were among the common features they shared.

“Doubtful,” replied Aarat, the nearly seven foot tall man who assumed the role of leader. He continued to speak while gazing among the others with his crystal blue eyes, “we’ve had nothing come through the channels since we’ve been down here.”

Hachillah, another male survivor, and clearly the oldest of them then questioned, “Why do you suppose they broke the agreement?”

Aarat looked at him briefly and then looked down and continued to speak as he dressed his leg wound, “We knew they could not be trusted, but there were no other options. If we had not agreed to their terms then what we are seeing now would have happened long ago regardless,” he then pulled down the pants leg of his blue jumpsuit and moved on to treating the child’s wounded forehead.

“But this was supposed to be a protected system, that was the only guarantee we had,” said Hachillah, holding a bucket of water while Aarat soaked a shiny silver-colored cloth.

“The Imperium is anything but predictable, they probably can’t help but be the way they are, it is in their genetic code.”

Hachillah asked again, “What of the blue world?”

Aarat answered, “The Imperium does not share in our rules of non-interference. As primitive as that world was when last observed, I cannot see how they would have been much of a

challenge. If what the Imperium has done to us is any indication of their might, we can only imagine the damage that would be done to such a defenseless world if attacked."

"So what can we do now?" asked the women holding the child as he fell fast asleep in her arms.

"We wait," Aarat said, "We managed to get a few of our vessels sent out prior to the Imperium's arrival, hopefully they will make contact with some of our other colonies and bring help. The odds of this possibility are slim given the Empire's rate of expansion."

Day turned into night as another of the red planet's moons came between the gas giant and Nibiru. The bunker then darkened as the only available source of light came from a glowing purple stone lying on the floor nearby. The room grew silent as each of the survivors prepared for rest.

Just a few miles away amid the open plain, what could only be explained as a series of concentration camps stood silently in the darkness. Countless humanoids were provided the implant one by one via means of a handheld device. Those who resisted or were immune to the effects of the implant were killed on the spot for all to see, as an example to all the others.

Out of desperation, one humanoid with torn clothing stained with blood broke the line and attempted to reach for an Imperium guard's

weapon. He then saw the tip of a blade that ran through his back and out his abdomen. This was a clear demonstration of control to the others. While most of the natives to this moon were as tall as six-foot-four on average, not one of their captures was over five-foot-seven.

Upon implantation, they were loaded unto a long and narrow reflective craft, which lifted off and transported the prisoners to some other location on the planet. Upon leaving it would be replaced by yet another transport of the same type immediately.

Despite their most advanced technologies, this once peaceful race was clearly in the wake of defeat. They had few living solders remaining; their planetary defense network was in ruins. All but a handful of their once proud fleet of ships now existed as a debris field drifting high above the moon's surface. The Grey had clearly demonstrated their power to these once proud people.

Chapter twelve

Earth

The skies filled with planes as one lifted off after another to join the SR-72, SR-75, SR-74 and now three of the re-modified SR-73 models in orbit. All of these aircraft were equipped with portable gravitomagnetic ring units, as well as particle cannons. Most of these were Stealth planes with added maneuvering thrusters to allow for better movement in space. Upon breaking orbit using their gravitomagnetic distortion field, they set a course to the lunar surface only to set down and shut off all systems except for those needed to support life.

"John, here they come," said Jason on board the Excalibur with a nervous tone in his voice.

"Wait for it," John replied while sitting on the edge of his seat. The command pit was barely illuminated by a dim red light coming from above.

As the Grey fleet passed silently overhead, each of the Earth craft began coming to life with lights and engines. They slowly started lifting off the surface of the moon. A small squadron of Stealth fighters sped off and approached the Im-

perium fleet from the rear. They simultaneously launched a set of missiles at the enemy ships and then pulled their noses up to break away. Several white flashes resulting from nuclear detonations that took place among the Grey cluster. The disarray forced one battle cruiser to collide with another, which brought about their immediate destruction.

John then stood up out of his chair and said, "That's our cue, lets go."

Jason pushed forward on a set of levers as the entire fleet of Earth ships and planes lifted off the surface of the moon. Immediately a swarm of Grey fighters departed from the rear launching bays of the alien ships in response to the obvious attack. The planes in the fleet broke formation to engage the alien fighters while the larger ships focused on the ships still on approach for Earth.

Space was suddenly lit up with blue and green light that was emitted from the particle weapons of nearly every ship. Commander Harrison, who was aboard the SR-74 took witness of an SR-71's complete destruction by the mere thrust from one of the mother ships. He stood nearly six-foot tall with a dark beard and dark brown eyes, "Goddangit, Seth, why ain't that section there protected by the shields?" he asked loudly in a strong southern accent.

"I, I dunno Commander, possibly because their propulsion would be ineffective if sur-

rounded by a shield, it would absorb the thrust," Seth replied, mouth slightly agape, as if he was unsure of his own words.

"Their engines work a lot like ours, negative energy, right?" the commander asked.

Seth answered, "Yes, and if there is any logic to that ship's design, then the gas tank is probably just ahead of them."

Harrison thought about it a moment and then ordered, "Fall in behind that vessel, and begin over-charging all of our cannons. Target the center thruster on that ship,"

Seth queried, "Sir? What do you hope to accomplish?" with a puzzled look on his face.

"I'm not sure, I just want to see what happens when anti-protons meet up with that exhaust." He said.

Seth responded, "Sir, I don't think we..."

"Damn it Seth, just do it!" he said.

Seth jumped back and then immediately began pressing buttons on his console. "Firing cannons sir."

All eight cannons then fired a steady blue beam of energy at the target that was indicated by the commander.

"As I feared, no effect commander," said Seth.

Harrison said with clear insistence in his voice, "Just hold 'em there, boy."

Two stealth fighters then fell in beside the SR-74 and joined in the effort, firing their can-

nons and missiles at the same point the beams were fixed on. Suddenly a flash occurred at the base of the engine's nozzle followed by an explosion. The fire quickly spread to the other four engines, bringing the ship to a sudden halt. Flames soon spread to engulf the entire rear end of the ship, illuminating the open space around it. The crew of the SR-74 watched in awe as they pulled their noses up to safety.

"I thought you were a scientist." Harrison said as he sat back down and crossed his legs.

Seth just shrugged his shoulders and said, "Just a lucky shot sir."

Nearby, three SR-73s fired consistently on the Incursive, Lord Zyron's personal flagship. The shipmaster, wearing a dark crimson uniform addressed Zyron, "My lord, we are being fired on. One of our battle cruisers has been disabled."

"Impossible!" Zyron yelled while seated high above the others on the bridge, "Destroy these nothings that dare to challenge us!"

The ship placed a single shot at two of the SR-73s, vaporizing them completely. A shot was then placed on the remaining 73, which knocked it into a clockwise spin.

The Excalibur was taking fire from several Grey fighters at the time Susan took notice. She acquired John's attention and cried, "John, we've lost two of the 73s and another is out of control."

"I was afraid they weren't up to this." He replied.

John tapped a couple buttons, bringing the remaining SR-73 up on his screen.

"Oh, God, is he doing what I think he's doing?" John asked.

"Bloody hell, he's headed straight for it! John, do something!" Susan yelled after processing what was going on. The SR-73 had regained control and set a course directly towards one of the Grey battleships.

John activated his radio, "Jackson, what the hell are you doing?"

The tall, dark skinned commander of the remaining SR-73 yelled over the radio, "The only thing these birds seem to be good for!"

The SR-73 then rammed into the Grey battle cruiser at a high velocity which caused the larger ship's energy shielding to begin to flicker.

"Damn it!" yelled John after witnessing Jackson's self-sacrifice.

"He and his wife just had a baby," Susan said softly, as she slowly looked down.

Jason then noted, "Look, that ship's shield's are faltering!"

John quickly glanced up at the ship and immediately ordered the pit crew to begin firing everything it had. The battle cruiser responded with heavy fire of its own in response to the Excalibur's attack.

Susan hollered, "John we can't take much more of this!" as electrical sparks flew from her console.

"Jason, why did the Hindenburg explode?" John asked as he quickly turned to Jason.

Jason hung on to his console to remain stationary and said, "I don't know, some idiot lit a cigarette I guess, this isn't a good time for a history lesson."

John looked to a blond haired man sitting at the flight controls in a black flight suit, he pointed to the viewer and said "Put us on course for a head on collision with that ship."

Susan quickly jumped between them, "John, don't you dare do this!"

John then replied with, "Don't worry Susan, it's not what you think." He then got on the radio, "Engine room, eject two H2 tanks on my mark."

Susan went on to speak out of concern, "John what are you..."

"Take it easy Susan, I think I know what he's planning to do," Jason said in calm voice.

As the Excalibur got within range, the Grey cruiser began to change course as if to avoid another collision.

"Drop the tanks!" John yelled over the radio. He then turned to the flight operator and said, "Now pull up, pull up and fire the engines!"

Two large metallic tanks drifted in space while the SR-75 pulled up and sped over the

haul of the Grey vessel. The Excalibur continued to fire missiles from its rear launchers. The Grey ship quickly fired on the Hydrogen tanks, which drifted nearby as if they were deemed a threat. The tanks immediately exploded, spreading fire over the unprotected haul. Suddenly a massive fireball consumed the ship itself. The crew of the Excalibur were stunned as though they didn't expect the final outcome.

Lord Zyron took notice of the ship's destruction almost instantly after it took place. He turned his attention to the Excalibur and yelled, "I want that fortress destroyed!"

On board the Excalibur, Susan shouted "John we are taking fire from the larger ship!"

"We've lost main power, and we can't get away! I think we've really pissed them off now," said Jason as the Incursive slowly began to close in on them.

Harrison took notice of the Stranded SR-75 and immediately set course to try to assist. He was followed by a Stealth Fighter and an SR-71 Blackbird. The SR-74 ejected a magnetic tow cable towards the Excalibur, while a glowing cannon targeted the 75's position. The two planes along with the arrival of the SR-72 provided cover fire. The SR-71 then took a hit from one of the Grey fighters, which in turn knocked it against the cable, snapping it in two. The sudden break of the cable sent Harrison's ship hurtling towards empty space.

“We’re picking another ship up on sensors,” cried a young voice in the command pit of the Excalibur.

“Just what we need, prepare a nuke for launch,” John said as if he knew they were about to be destroyed.

Jason then queried, “Ah, John, that’s not like any Grey ship I’ve ever seen.” He said as he looked at the ship on approach. It appeared to be triangular shaped and composed of a highly reflective, chrome-colored haul.

Everyone looked to the monitor, “Well it’s certainly not one of ours. What is it and where did it come from?” Susan asked.

Jason replied, “I don’t know, just showed up out of nowhere. But in case you haven’t noticed, that other ship still plans on having us for breakfast.”

The mysterious ship then placed itself between the Excalibur and the Incursive, taking the blast that was intended to destroy the heavily damaged 75. A large purple-like wave then emitted from the unfamiliar ship, which blasted a hole into the side of Zyron’s ship. A moment later, the reflective ship vanished from site before any ship in the mix could identify it.

“What was that!” shouted Zyron.

“We do not know my lord, some type of matter disruptor. We’ve lost our shielding and sustained heavy damage,” the shipmaster replied.

Zyron clinched his four-fingered fist in anger as he showed a row of sharply pointed teeth. "Where did it come from and *where* did they get that type of weapon?"

The Incursive then changed direction and fired a shot with the intention of destroying the battle cruiser that had been sent adrift by the SR-74.

"Seems we've provided this race with enough technology," Zyron said just before he and his fleet suddenly re-grouped and then appeared to vanish into deep space. Zyron viewed the image of the drifting SR-75 on his monitor as they sped away.

"We will be back" he said to himself as the image became smaller by the second on his viewer.

"Looks like we won, I guess victory *does* belong to those that want it the most." Said Jason as his chair swivelled into a 360-degree turn-about.

John just gazed into empty space trying to put together the events had just taken place. "I wish I could believe that Jason, I really do, but I get the feeling all we have done is break the seal of Pandora's box."

John continued to look into the direction that the Grey fleet had vanished into and said, "Just get those damn engines working."

Chapter thirteen

A single control ship was all that could be found at Nibiru in Zyron's search for reinforcements. He then decided to return to his home world for some much needed repairs before attempting to seek revenge on his new enemies. As his crippled fleet entered into their home space, he was greeted by Aturos laughing out loud over the communications system.

"So, it would appear you're superior tactics have failed you. You seem to have underestimated the blue planet yet again, Zyron." He sneered.

"Nothing has changed, the human world will have our flag flying high above it or it *will* be destroyed!"

"You're wanted by the council, it appears there are many questions in regards to your recent failures," Aturos said with clear criticism in his voice.

"Watch it Aturos, or you will suffer the same fate as the Humanoids!" he replied while clinching his fists.

"I would be more concerned about keeping my title if I were you, *Lord Zyron*."

Zyron while angered, ordered his crew to cut the channel and dock at the nearest port for repairs.

As Zyron walked into the Chambers, all that was heard were the echoes of his footfalls. As he sat down, a light glowed overhead while darkness surrounded him on all sides. Whispers started coming from every direction, which were soon overpowered by a loud, deep.

“Zyron, we have brought you hear to inform you that our stance regarding H-551 has changed. After two failed attempts under your command to capture the planet, we have decided to postpone our assault on that world indefinitely. We will order a review into the technological capabilities of these people, along with an investigation into *your* ability to carry out the tasks, which you were previously presented. You are hereby ordered to stand down your fleet until further notice.”

As the light over Zyron’s head dimmed into darkness, he continued to sit there with what appeared to be pure rage in his large black eyes. This continued while footsteps could be heard from the chambers emptying all around him.

Earth Orbit

“John, the fleet is ready for re-entry,” echoed a voice coming from the backside of the command pit.

“Spin the rings to gravitomagnetic speeds and bring our planes down.” he replied.

As the planes began to land on the runways in Florida, the three remaining ships set a course for Graviton Mountain to begin repairs and more important, attempt to figure out what had happened in the final moments of their last engagement. Upon arrival John spoke into the radio, “Senior Graviton and government Staff, please meet in the conference room in three hours. Bring all sensor data that can be made available.”

Three Hours Later....

John walked into the debriefing room and took a seat at a large glossy oval table made up of black walnut. To his right were four men dressed in Air Force attire, with Rikker and three other NASA officials to his left. Across from him sat Susan, and Jason sitting next to her who appeared anxious to speak.

“Jason, are you suffering from an overdose on caffeine?” John asked.

“John, Sir, I mean Mr. Stone...” Jason said with excitement.

“Just calm down Jason, take your time, anything on our secret savoir?” asked John.

Jason took a few deep breaths, stood up and began pacing around the room, slowly speaking. He starred at his own feet as they brushed the grey carpet. “Sorry John, nothing on that object but we have found something that may be of value to us. Based on the direction in which the enemy fleet departed, we may have triangulated their destination.”

Jason then walked to a control panel containing an uplink with the Hubble-II space Telescope. He began entering coordinates that were written inside a paper notebook that he held in his left hand.

“This is where it went”, he said while pointing at the screen.

As everyone in the room viewed the screen, Susan spoke out first, “Can you zoom in any closer than that?”

While Jason zoomed in, he quickly took notice of what Susan was looking at.

“Is that a star we’re looking at?” asked Susan with a curious tone of voice.

Jason continued to punch in numbers, noting the object’s orbit and other factors. As the computer’s results began to appear on the screen, the room went silent for a moment.

"It looks like its in orbit around our sun," said Dr. Ramsey, one of the NASA specialists on planetary exploration. He bumped up his thick set of glasses with his right index finger and looked into Rikker's direction.

"Could it be an asteroid or a comet?" asked Rikker

Susan looked up at the screen again, "It's far too big to be an asteroid and even if a star did share this system with our sun, it's far too little. I know this might sound crazy, but I think it's a planet, but is that even possible? Surely we would have spotted it before now."

A tall man in a white shirt and black pants then began speaking, "I suppose it is possible. After the Kepler mission began, our funding primarily went towards finding hospitable planets outside our solar system. A new planet inside our own solar system wasn't considered much after that."

Dr. Ramsey added, "Several years ago we noticed a gravitational tug on Neptune, we never did figure out what that was."

John who at first appeared bored with the lingo then decided to speak, "This is definitely worth looking in to. If this is in fact where they came from, we may be able to take the fight to them for a change. Moving on, I believe Rikker had something he needed to say."

Rikker took a sip of his coffee and began to speak as he placed his cup back onto the table,

“So far we have been taking some alien technology along with our own, throwing it on our most advanced planes and hoping for the best. By all means, don’t get me wrong; Graviton has done an extraordinary job in making that happen. However, Congress, the Military and United Nations feel we need something a bit more manageable after being briefed on the latest advances made by your company.”

“Such as?” John commented as he raised one eyebrow slightly higher than the other.

Rikker continued to speak, “Congress has approved funding to create a type of Planetary Defense Force, or at least that is what they called it. Given the clear amount of experience provided to your team, John, they would like you to run it. Put simply, you and your people are the only ones who have the slightest clue how this technology even works.”

John was surprised at first and asked, “What will it involve?”

The NASA administrator then detailed, “A vast array of weapon based satellites to surround our planet, including a base on the moon in the near future. Funding will be also be set aside for least one Fleet of battle ready space ships. They feel the time has come do something about these attacks, and your company has the technology to do just that.”

A statement Jason made under his breath then interrupted Rikker briefly, "What's left of it you mean."

Ignoring Jason's comment, Rikker went on to speak, "In addition to the ships, a fighter and bomber will need to be designed specifically for combat in deep space. They have agreed that these ships and planes will be built in this country, but could be stationed around the world. The details of all this are still being worked out, but it is clear that the world is willing to come together to counter this very real threat from among the stars. Fortunately the United States is leading that effort thanks to you and your team."

"Surely this violates the Geneva Convention," Susan mentioned.

"The Geneva Convention is being re-written as we speak to accommodate for this program. More specifically, they want safeguards on these birds that prevent them from being used against another nation."

A General to the right of John then followed Rikker's comment, "All involved parties want this protection net, and they want it as soon as humanly possible. We are authorized to provide Graviton Industries with whatever they need, including unlimited manpower and other resources. We just need to know if you guys will do it."

John thought about it for a moment and then responded, “I’ll need far more engineers and pilots ready to learn how this tech works, as well as more hangers and manufacturing facilities. Considering the war to come, I can see that we have no choice in the matter so I think I speak for all of my associates when I say we’ll do it”.

Within days, the project was under way. Facilities were to be built all across the nation to carry out the excessive demands of the project. After over a year, many questions were raised in congress as to why the world hasn’t suffered any further attacks during that time, but it wasn’t enough to bring a halt to the entities at work. Some politicians would try to cut funding from time to time behind closed doors. They would suggest that the Grey were not coming back, or that such an expensive fleet wasn’t needed to ward off the invaders in the previous attacks. They would also claim that the funding could better be used to rebuild the damaged infrastructure, despite the fact that all fifty states were provided with more than enough money to aid in these efforts. Others suggested that they simply didn’t like the weight of the world being put in the hands of a private company, one which few have even heard of until recent days. The majority however justified Graviton’s position on the matter and felt safer with the project in the hands of those who some called their saviours. After all, the voters knew who the heroes

were thanks to the media, and almost any politician who spoke against John and his team would be sure to lose support from vast majority of voters. The upcoming election would also select a new cabinet for the newly rebuilt and vacant White House, which was something neither political party wanted to risk losing.

Chapter fourteen

50 miles North of Salt Lake City, Utah

While Graviton Corp. mechanics were still hard at work attaching the hull of their newest, most cutting-edge ship to date, the Excalibur, John and Commander Rikker could easily be seen walking throughout the inside through segments where the outer walls had not yet been welded on. Several cutting torches were hard at work all around the two as they travelled through the gigantic vessel. As they neared the aft region, they entered what would soon be the ship's engine room where John recognized Seth holding a welding rod, bent over a generator. He approached the younger man, Commander Rikker in tow, hoping to get some details as to what the project's status was. His team had surely come a long way in just the short amount of time.

"Seth!" John yelled, rather loudly to catch his attention over all the noise of machinery going on around them.

Seth looked up and around at the pair standing behind him and lifted off his welding hood.

“John, Ed,” he acknowledged, “what brings you two to Utah?”

He smiled, obviously glad to see them. He set his hood aside and wiped the sweat off his forehead with his left shirtsleeve.

John looked around and said, “Well, this ship, of course. You've really outdone yourself here, Seth, it's certainly an impressive piece of engineering.”

Seth grinned again, looking quite proud of him self. “That she is, sir, we have a number of others just like her being built here as well, but I don't know, this one just seems special to me.” he replied. He then turned, and directed the others' attention to a large section of the hull hanging behind him, pending attachment to the ship. On its outer facade was its name, “Excalibur”. The insignia was bold and stood out beautifully against the sleek, polished titanium exterior.

“Yes, Seth, I know what you mean. This ship, though mechanically identical to all the rest, will always be my favorite.” John said, a slight look of awe coming to his eyes, as he stood gazing up at her.

“Hey, you guys want a quick tour of the ship's interior?” Seth asked anxiously.

John nodded emphatically, looking down at his watch. Rikker replied, “Sure, Seth, that would be great.” John then added, “Our flight to New York doesn't leave for a while, we've got some time to check it out. Lead the way.”

Seth wrapped up the tour about an hour later, concluding with a vastly complex explanation of how the ship's engines worked. They entered a large hall, almost as big as the ship itself, both in length and width, as if the entire structure had been built around that particular area. In the center of the great hall, they observed three large rings making up the particle accelerator, each ring several yards in diameter. At the center of each ring was a smaller power station consisting of eight large electromagnets placed at an even distance throughout the inner circle.

"These are the plasma acceleration rings here." Seth said.

John looked up at one ring, which was not yet complete, noting that the ten foot high copper hoop was, in fact, hollow on the inside. "I have always wondered what one of these things looked like on the inside." he said, looking towards Rikker.

Seth then went on to explain, "Well, they'll soon be filled with a form of Mercury-based plasma, similar to that on your old ship. It'll circulate at extraordinary speeds by means of the electromagnets you see surrounding it.

John looked closely, examining the inside once again and laughed. "You know, I've told Jason to spin these things so many times, yet I never really knew what that meant, exactly, until now." he said.

At that moment, Seth's cell phone buzzed from the case attached to his belt and after pulling it out and reading the text message, Seth looked up apologetically, saying, "Sorry to have to cut this short, but they need me back up in the engine room." The disappointment was evident in his voice, and perhaps a bit of weariness, as well. He had been hard at work on this project for weeks now and had accomplished more in that short time than many of Graviton's other engineers could have done in six months. John was very grateful to have such a dedicated employee and was proud to call him a friend, as well. He looked down at his watch and his eyes bulged a bit as he realized the time. "Wow, Seth, that's fine, I understand you're needed elsewhere and to be honest, our pilot is probably wondering where in the hell we are. We were supposed to be at the launch pad ten minutes ago." John said in a rush, waving a farewell to Seth and ushering Rikker to the exit. "Thanks for your time, Seth," he called over his shoulder, "It's been a pleasure, as usual!"

As he opened the door to exit out into the hanger, he and Rikker heard Seth respond, "Anytime, Chief, anytime!"

**United Nations Building
New York City, New York**

Some time later, John found himself being ushered up to a podium in front of the entire United Nations committee while he prepared to make an address to the leaders of the world. Standing behind him, lined up near the back of the stage, were several of his employees, all dressed in black flight suits identical to the one he was wearing. Among the countless bodies standing in line, were Jason and Susan, who simultaneously nodded at John as he passed on his way to the front of the stage.

The floor was filled almost to maximum capacity as world leaders, delegates, scientists and soldiers all co-mingled with members of the press. The floor lights dimmed only to be lit up sporadically by flashbulbs from dozens of cameras aimed up at John. The roar of conversation immediately became a dull murmur as a single spotlight focused on John at his podium. Only he and the huge screen above his head with the United Nation's Defense Force insignia displayed in bold, italic lettering were clearly visible. John smoothly adjusted his microphone to the proper level, cleared his throat and began to speak.

“Several decades ago, my father, Stephen Stone, founded Graviton Industries with hopes of bettering humanity. Little did he know, what he was really doing was laying down ground-work for a future in planetary defense technology, technology that has aided in the restoration of a once invaded planet. Before moving on, I would like to take a moment of silence for all of the victims lost, as well as those brave soldiers and pilots who gave their lives to protect all the nations represented before me now.”

The hall remained silent for a moment, then John went on to speak again, “Now, on to business. As most of you know, my company has been asked to work closely with NASA and other military groups around the world to secure and defend our planet against any further aggression. Thanks to the hard work of many people around the world, we have not only developed the technology to protect our way of life, but the force to give these would-be invaders a run for their money, should they try hitting us again.”

The crowd applauded for a moment, but with a few downward palm waves, John quickly quieted them. “Please allow me to now introduce to you our newest interstellar war vehicles, the Planetary Defense Fleet, or PDF for short. We have built 47 space capable battle ships, each with a firing power never before seen on an Earth-made military vehicle, all of which are ca-

pable of near light speed. For security reasons and to prevent the placement of all our planetary eggs into one basket, so to speak, these vessels will be placed all across the globe. This has indeed been a vast amount of progress put out in such a very short time, which only goes to show what our species is capable of when push comes to shove.”

John then reached for his glass of water atop the small table beside the podium and took a sip before continuing. “Among these battle ready ships are just over a dozen carriers. They are designed to transport up to 87 Star Fighters, specialty battle-planes that I will provide details on in just a moment. All of these ships are built with stealth capabilities that should allow them to go undetected by enemy radar at long distances... as far as we can tell,” he said. He then went on to explain, “These are fully armed vessels built specifically for interstellar conflict, but every vessel has a failsafe to prevent it from firing on any nation of this world.”

Camera bulbs continued to flash unrelentingly in John's direction as images of the ships now appeared on the screen behind him. “Now let me introduce the Dark Angel. This star fighter may act as both a fighter and a bomber. Though they are not capable of near the speed of the ships themselves, they can fly up to Mach-15 and be transported across great distances in space by means of the carrier ships. Each of these

stealth fighters are equipped with three anti-proton cannons along with the means to carry up to a dozen or more bombs and/or missiles. Their laser guided tracking system provides the most advanced weapon delivery technology on Earth. Speaking of weapons, allow me to conclude with the introduction of the X-99 missile. Containing a miniature model of the VMP device, these guys can be launched at incredible speeds from any of the craft I have mentioned. In theory, the sheer force of the impact alone will deal a great blow to any target; in fact it may be capable of penetrating the enemy's shielding, provided enough launch speed. We are uncertain of this detail until we are actually able to use one against such shielding, however it looks very promising."

"It was once said that in order to secure peace, we must be prepared for war. So, to our enemy, I say this, 'You got us once, but you will not get us twice! We are ready for you this time!'"

Everyone in the audience simultaneously rose to their feet and applauded fiercely as John bowed his head briefly to the crowd, then he was escorted out by military police. About a dozen soldiers saluted him on his way to a nearby shuttle that bore the Graviton logo. Jason, Susan, and Rikker soon joined him as it prepared for takeoff. As the sixteen foot long titanium craft lifted off the ground, they were

once again surrounded by camera bulb flashes as both the press and local civilians attempted to capture this hopeful day in Earth's history onto film.

Chapter fifteen

Graviton Heavy Industries

As the shuttle prepared to set down at the old mountain complex, John couldn't help but notice the resting place of the SR-75 and SR-74 prototypes. These vessels were being prepared for transport to Edwards Air Force Base, located in the state of California, where they were to be put on display.

John turned to Susan and said, "Aren't they going to fix some of that haul damage?"

Susan replied, "I asked the same question, evidently they feel the damage represents a great mark in our history."

John responded, "It's a good thing we haven't needed it between then and now. I wonder why the Grey haven't come back yet, I mean they nearly had us."

"Maybe we scared them off," blurted Jason who was sitting across from the two in the shuttle.

"I highly doubt that Jason," said Susan, "we should be receiving data from the reconnais-

sance we sent any time now. Maybe it'll shed some light on the subject."

"I still think we should have sent more than one ship on that mission" said John.

Jason replied, "It would have just made it that much easier to spot, besides, the telescopic video recorder will enable them to travel only as far as Neptune to get a look at what's going on out there."

"I suppose your right," John replied.

"Of course I...Hey, we're setting down," Jason said, interrupting the conversation.

After the landing struts extended in full, the shuttle landed on a black pad while the rear began to open into a ramp. The passengers removed their safety restraints and began exiting the craft one at a time beginning with, followed by Susan, John and then the pilot. They headed to the Graviton control center to await news from the reconnaissance craft hiding within Neptune's rings.

"Video is beginning to roll in", Susan said as she sat at a computer terminal. She then tapped a few keys that sent the feed to the overhead screen for all to see. The group watched anxiously as the screen went into focus, showing the large red planet and then moving on to its surrounding moons.

"Right there, you see that?" Rikker said to the group.

The shot revealed what appeared to be lights on one of the moons, comparable to Earth's night side. Susan then pressed a few more keys, causing the image to pan left and zoom.

John slowly rose out of his chair as he said, "Is that what I think it is?"

"Sure looks like it." Susan replied.

What they were looking at was clearly a large saucer shaped control ship in orbit around the moon. "Well it looks like we found what we were looking for.", said Rikker.

"Pan around to see if there are any space craft in the area." John said as he motioned to the screen.

"I'm not noticing anything else, just that one ship. Could they be on the planet or one of the other moons? Susan questioned.

Jason commented, "Doubtful, I've seen no indication that their larger space ships are capable of landing on a planet's surface."

John said with a curious tone, "Then where are their defenses? Where are those ships that attacked us?"

Jason attempted to answer John's questions with speculation, "Maybe they don't need any defenses, either due to the fact that we are the only other world that supports intelligent life, or simply because of just plain ignorance on their part. Their fleet *could* just be away on some other business *or* this could merely be an outpost of some kind. Either way, I am certain this is where

they retreated to, *and* we're seeing activity on the planet. As far as I'm concerned, this is the spot."

John then looked towards Ed queried, "What do you think?"

"It's hard to say without risk John. On one hand there could be an entire armada of ships hiding somewhere around that planet, but on the other hand Jason could be right which means this may be the opportunity we've been looking for. Allow me to present this data to the people upstairs, we'll go from there."

"Sounds like a plan" John said while he rubbed his chin with his left forefinger and thumb, continuing to look at the overhead monitor.

Florida, United States
Earth, Sol System

Inside of a large conference room located deep inside NASA headquarters sat the usual Graviton team along with Rikker and several Air Force commanders seated around a large table.

Rikker began to speak, "Forgive me for not providing a reason for this meeting, the NSA has declared this mission top secret."

A few people around the table gave a nod of understanding as Rikker went on to speak, "Congress, as well as the United Nations, would like to send a handful of our ships to the planet

we are now referring to as Nemesis. We will then launch a series of star fighters towards the moon in which we believe to be a Grey outpost, or possibly their home world. We will be sending enough ships to take out the Grey ship in orbit around that moon. If it's anything like the one that was above us at one point, then this part of the plan shouldn't be a problem."

"What if we face resistance on the moon, or their main fleet returns?" shouted one of the Air Force Commanders. He had a shiny bald head and a uniform populated with medals.

Rikker went on to provide a generic response to his question, "We know this is risky, but this is a chance to deal a crippling blow to our enemy on our own terms," he said. He then cleared his throat and signalled John to take over with his right hand.

"While we are engaging the Saucer, we will dispatch two waves of fighters from the Enterprise Carrier. One will target any Grey fighters that the saucer will by no doubt release, while the second will survey the planet and drop a series of nuclear weapons on any target deemed of value to our enemy," said John.

A voice interrupted John, "But what if? What if they have an entire fleet just waiting for us somewhere in the region? We can't honestly assume they left the place undefended."

Commander Harrison just sat and pondered the plan while the others spoke. Then he said,

“We are confident that we are sending enough ships to provide resistance in the event we are surprised. Four ships will go after the Grey ship in orbit around the moon. The remaining six will provide cover fire for the carrier to recall the planes in case we need to make a run for it”.

“This is insane!” yelled a short man wearing a flight suit, “we haven’t seen so much as a hint that another attack on Earth will happen. We should leave well enough alone and stand in defense for our own planet, not stir things up in their own back yard. All this will do is piss them off and force them into another attack on Earth.”

“Right,” yet another person commented, “we shouldn’t press our luck.”

John stood up and threw his hands on the table, “Now listen, when we fought back that fleet we didn’t have the benefit or comfort of an entire fleet of ships waiting to help us out. No, we were out there by ourselves in ships that could have flown apart at any minute. In fact my own ship almost did just that. We didn’t know if half their systems would even work! This fleet wasn’t designed to merely jack up the price of titanium and mercury. They were designed to perform missions just like this. Now if any of you don’t feel this mission is worth the risk, then you’re welcome to lay your wings on this table and go home. I for one don’t plan on just sitting here while we wait their return. We have fought them back twice already, and lost a great number of

lives in the process. When they *do* return, I promise you they will see to it they bring enough firepower to do it right the next time. Have you forgotten what they did to our planet before so much as setting foot on it? This enemy has managed to kill off entire bloodlines. This might just be a pinprick to them, but I intend to make sure it goes straight through their heart. I might have expected this from a civilian, but not from a group of men who have sworn to do whatever is necessary to protect this nation."

The room grew silent as John slowly sat back down with his hands still firmly mounted to the table. Susan, who sat next to him, rubbed his shoulder and then gave John a light pat on the back as the color in his face started to returned to normal.

Jason's eyes widened while he silently uttered the words "Wow, just wow."

After a moment, Rikker broke the brief silence. "I have to agree with John, if anybody here doesn't want to go through with this, then there's the door," he said as he pointed towards the exit.

Several people in the room lowered their heads while nobody accepted Rikker's invitation to leave.

"Very good," said Ed, "the trip will take several hours, so get rested. We leave tomorrow afternoon, dismissed."

Susan approached John as the room vacated, “You all right John?” she asked with her hand on his right shoulder.

John replied, “Yeah, I’ll be fine. It’s just amazing how much some people take for granted even after everything this world’s been through.”

“I don’t think those men speak for everybody, most people just can’t wait to strike them back. Hey, a few of us are going out for some drinks at *The Hanger*, you’re more than welcome to join us.”

“Thank you Susan, for everything. I think a stiff drink is just what the doctor ordered.”

They both disappeared into the hall and began walking towards the nearest exit to the outside of the building.

Chapter sixteen

**Kennedy Space Center
Florida, United States**

"Begin pre-launch confirmations," echoed a voice through the worldwide communication network.

"This is Captain Harrison, Relinquent II ready for launch."

"Captain Reynolds aboard the Challenger, we are good to go."

"Commander Cox, Atlantis is standing by."

"Captain Forest aboard Enterprise Carrier, awaiting orders."

"Lieutenant Harwood of the Endeavor, we stand ready."

"This is John Stone, Excalibur II is ready for launch."

"Edwards, this is Kennedy Space Center, awaiting confirmations for launch."

"Kennedy, this is Edwards Air Force Base, all birds are standing by on a launch pad awaiting launch confirmation."

"Kennedy Flight readiness confirmed, we are go for launch, we repeat, we are go for launch."

“Confirmed, Edwards reporting go for launch status.”

Following the launch confirmations, the divided fleet began a countdown to lift off their designated launch pads. The roaring of their engines were so loud that they were heard for a radius of several miles from their launch points located at opposite ends of the United States. The ten massive ships lifted off and moments later, united into a single formation, approximately two kilometers apart from one another. Upon breaching orbit, the engines grew silent due to the absence of air surrounding them.

“Sir, the fleet reports zero mass acceleration potential in all VMP units,” a man said to John over the radio.

“Confirmed, please inform the ships they may fire their main engines. Jason, put it to the floor,” said John slightly turning his head to Jason.

Starting with the Excalibur, the engines of every ship in the fleet glowed bright blue, just before quickly vanishing into deep space following the release of the field surrounding the VMP units. Once this dampening field is released, the Variable Mass Propulsion effect instantly engulfs the ship. With the engines already at full thrust, the ships’ instant reduction in mass literally slings it into open space.

“Velocity has reached 177,000 MPS,” Jason reported from his console, “backing off a bit, don’t want to get there before we left.”

“What do you mean?” John asked.

Jason answered, “Or something like that, the law of relativity says mass cannot exceed the speed of light.”

“But we are zero mass, aren’t we? Doesn’t that make us exempt from that theory?” John questioned once again.

Jason explained, “Not really, I mean we say we’ve reached zero mass, but that’s not really true. We are actually near zero mass, we have to maintain some weight in order for the thrusters to have something to push up against. The matter around crew areas also remains unaffected by the field.”

Susan then joined in on the conversation, “So you’re telling us we can’t travel any faster than light. That type of speed limit places some heavy limitations on us when it comes to actually exploring other star systems.”

“Sorry, but that’s just the way it is. Einstein wrote the laws, I just enforce them,” said Jason.

John then asked, “What if Einstein was wrong? I mean that was over a century ago, he may have changed his mind if he with us right now.”

“Nope, laws are laws, there’s no way around them.” Jason replied as if it was common sense.

“Last thing we want to do is break Jason’s law,” Susan said jokingly.

John smiled at the idea that his team wasn’t bothered by the mission at hand. He sat back in his chair located in the center of the command pit and thought about what Jason had said. If there were a cosmic speed limit, then the Grey would have to abide by the very same laws. This increased the confidence in the belief that they were in fact in route to the Grey home world. He thought that with this limitation, the enemy *had* to reside within the same star system. Especially when one considers how quickly they responded to the destruction of the control ship that once orbited Earth. This added new tension to an already stressful situation. Not to mention, it may also indicate that the Grey’s main fleet was not so far away from the point in space in which they were heading after all.

“It seems as though this will be a long trip, I’m going to grab some lunch. If you need me I’ll be in the lounge, Susan you have the pit.” John said just before he left the room and started up a set of metal stairs that lead to a nearby corridor.

“Of course John, I think we got things under control at the moment,” Susan replied. She then turned to Jason and said, “He looks a bit nervous doesn’t he?”

“Who wouldn’t be nervous while moving at over 170,000 miles per second,” said Jason.

“That’s not quite what I meant, but I suppose we’ve all been pushing our limits lately,” Susan noted.

Jason put down his calculator. He looked at her and said, “He’s got a lot on his mind just like the rest of us, but get him into the heat of a conflict and he’ll be more than ready. Try not to worry, what’s the worst than can happen aside from our death.”

“I suppose your right in a groom sort of way,” Susan said.

Jason then asked, “If you don’t mind, would you care to help me with the VMP deceleration calculations? I’d prefer not to stop right at their front door if I could help it.”

“Of course,” she replied. She pulled a calculator out of her flight suit’s pocket and scooted Jason aside a bit to share his console’s screen.

Several hours later, Jason awakened John. He had fallen asleep in his command chair after returning from his meal. His colleagues decided to let him rest while they continued to pilot the ship.

“John,” said Jason in a short but firm tone of voice, “We’re less than an hour away from our destination. We’ve slowed down enough to commence normal communications with the fleet.”

John quickly came into consciousness and said “Huh? What? Sorry, I seem to have dosed off. How long was I out?” he asked.

"It's alright, wasn't much for you to do anyway. You've been out nearly seven hours; you slept through most of the trip," Susan answered.

John noticed an image on the main screen, "*Is that our planet?*"

"Our planet yes, but not the moon we're headed to," said a blond headed young man in a black flight suit.

"It's quite a site," John said as he viewed the red gas giant on the monitor, "Are we close enough to pick up any activity?" he asked.

"We see the saucer ship as expected, but that's it so far. We are still too far away to see anything considerably less in size," said Susan.

"Where are they?" John questioned openly, "Do you think they can see us?"

"Based on their activity I'd have to say no, it's still just sitting there. They haven't even launched any fighters" Susan replied.

"Lieutenant Erickson, can you put me through to Harrison?" John said to a brown haired, brown-eyed woman stationed at a console behind him.

"Aye Sir, Commander Harrison is on the horn."

"What do you think commander?" John asked Harrison while adjusting his headset.

"I think I'm going to be sick to my stomach after that long flight. Funny how lunch tasted good going down but tends to make us feel

scared shitless a few hours later,” replied the commander.

John grinned and commented, “I know what you mean, but I suppose I’m as ready as I ever will be.”

“Roger that Commander Stone, I believe we all are, not that we have much of a choice in the matter. Look at the bright side, we finally get to nail these bastards,” he said.

“Copy that Commander, I’ll contact you as we close in a bit more on our approach,” said John in closing.

“Roger that, Harrison out.”

John thought about the commander’s words, and though he never was a vengeful type of person throughout his life. Still, he couldn’t help but feel the comfort that would rest within him if their mission should be successful. On that note, he turned to a console that was embedded into the armrest of his chair, and began to check the status of the ship’s systems one by one.

Chapter seventeen

Sol, Outer Rim

"John, Harrison is requesting you on the radio," said Lieutenant Erickson while holding her left hand to the headset.

John threw a switch on the armrest on his chair and responded, "Stone here."

"John, Seth brought something to my attention that could be of use. In the last battle we had with these guys, we noticed that if we focused our cannons on a single spot, the enemy's shield in that area seemed to weaken tremendously," explained Commander Harrison.

John looked at Jason as though he was asking a question. Jason thought about it a second and then responded, "It's possible, we know their shields hold an opposite charge from that of our cannons. Question is where do we hit them?"

"Did you hear that Commander?" John asked over the radio.

"Affirmative. Well it *is* shaped like a saucer. I'm willing to bet money on the fact that it has a sweet spot right dead smack in the middle of it."

I say the bull's eye marks the spot!" said Harrison.

"Makes sense," Jason verbally noted while viewing a diagram of the control ship that once sat in Earth's orbit.

John thought about it a minute and spoke loud enough so that everyone could hear him, "Let's do it. Erickson, please notify the Challenger and Atlantis that we will target the center of the disk."

"Aye Sir," she replied while turning back to her console.

Five out of the ten ships, including the carrier, broke formation and headed towards the control ship while the rest of the fleet came to a full stop. Two waves of star fighters began to depart from the Enterprise four at a time, ending after a total of sixty-five fighters had been released. Approximately half stayed with the fleet while those armed with a mix of missiles and bombs headed towards the surface of the moon not far below. As the control ship grew larger in the overhead monitor, John could not help but notice the debris field that they had come to pass. "What do you think happened here Susan?" he asked.

"Looks like a battle took place, and *that* looks familiar," she said as she pointed towards the remains of a triangular shaped craft drifting among the debris.

“Do you think that whoever those folks were got here before us?” John speculated.

“Its possible, could be what happened to the enemy fleet, our target may be the only vessel that survived,” Susan hypothesized.

John added, “It could also be the reason we’ve not endured any attacks on Earth since the last battle. Someone could have beat us to it.”

Jason blurted out, “Well considering there are far more of those triangle looking ships than there are Grey, I would assume the Grey were the winners when it came down to it.”

“If that’s the case Jason, they didn’t win by much looking at what’s left.” John noted.

They were then interrupted by Susan who said, “We’re going to have to try to figure it later John, the saucer has just released a pack of fighters. I’m sure they’re headed this way!”

John looked at his screen and then instantly replied, “Quite right, order our fighters to intercept, and put us in a position over that ship.”

As the Dark Angels moved to intercept the Grey fighters, the four battle cruisers spread out evenly around the control ship with their noses pointed directly at it. “Inform the fleet to open fire!” John yelled out openly. He then sat down on his chair while viewing several monitors around him while the shooting began. He said to him self, “Here we go.”

The saucer began to spin rapidly as it fired energy blasts from its outer tips towards the in-

vading fighters. John could hear one of the fleet commanders holler over the radio, "Our reaction chamber has taken a direct hit. We are attempting to re-stabilize the magnetic containment field!"

Similar statements were being broadcasted continuously, yet all four ships keep their cannons focused on the dome located in the top center of the control ship.

"We've lost our port cannon," was then heard over the radio as one of the blue beams vanished from the mix. The once glowing green circle surrounding the center of the ship then began to turn bright red as the fleet continued to lay fire to it.

"They've lost shielding in the target area!" cried Jason with his eyes glued to a console located just above him.

The launchers on all four ships then sprouted from below them, preparing to fire a set of X-99 missiles. As the cannons continued blasting, the missiles began to launch nothing more than what appeared to be a streak of colorful light onto the center of the target. A massive ring of fire began to extend around the center of the ship as it had seized firing upon the fleet.

Harrison's voice soon came over the radio on all the ships, "Back it up boys, I think this thing is going to blow!"

The ships started moving in reverse, while slowly placing their sterns toward the alien craft.

Their rear engines then fired, causing them to move away from each other in opposite directions. As the control ship began to implode against its own shields, the fleet turned their attention to group of fighters near by. Each of the ships' cannons suddenly opened fire on the smaller Grey fighters, to assist the star fighters already in action. Finally after several minute, a pilot was heard over the radio, "Bravo leader to Big Momma, I think that's the last of 'em."

John quickly turned around to view the large monitor mounted over the top rear of the command pit. There he watched what was left of the control ship drifting away behind them. He then turned to the communications officer and said, "Patch me through to the Alpha flight leader."

"Alpha leader, go ahead," said a pilot over the radio.

"This is Excalibur, show us what you are seeing down there?" he asked.

A video feed displayed on the monitor to John's right, the entire crew then turned to share his view. On the screen displayed the ruins of what looked like a city. Other images showed Grey and triangular craft wreckage spread throughout the surface. "Freeze right there!" John yelled. He had taken notice of what appeared to be an air field containing a large number of the triangular ships similar to that which assisted them in the previous battle near Earth. They appeared undamaged and as though they

had been stationary for quite some time. As the images continued to zoom in, Susan said, "Look at that, did you see it? I know that looked like a Grey lying on the ground, but look just below it."

John took notice of what Susan was looking at and commented, "This might sound crazy but they look sort of human."

John was then cut short as he heard a broadcast over the radio, "Bravo leader, we are initiating the bombing run..."

John looked at the image again and then quickly jumped to pick up a headset, "This is John Stone, delay the bombing run, I repeat, delay the bombing!"

All the fighters near the surface immediately retracted their launchers and then pulled up almost simultaneously upon receiving the message.

Only a moment after, Harrison came over the radio, "What's going on John?"

John replied, "This isn't the Grey home world, or even outpost for that matter."

"Could have fooled me, if it isn't then what the hell is it?" Harrison queried.

"I'm not one hundred percent sure, but those ships on the surface are nearly identical to the one that saved our asses back on Earth."

Susan put her own headset on, "Commander I think he's right, in fact I'm almost certain of it."

Harrison looked at the video feed himself for a moment and said, "You know, this would explain a great number of things. We never thought for a second that these could be mere victims of the same type of invasion like we faced back home. So what do we do now Mr. Graviton?"

"I think we should inform our fighters to target known Grey technology only, they should be able to tell the difference easy enough by now. We need to make sure we leave who or whatever else is down there alone. Last thing we need to do is make another enemy out here." John said in a clear yet firm tone. However, the uncertainty in his voice was obvious to anybody who was listening.

"And what if we've already made an enemy of this bunch? For all they know, we are the ones that attacked them in the first place." Asked Commander Harrison.

"I don't think it works that way George, I don't think these people are a threat to us right now, I mean look at them," John explained.

Harrison responded, "Go figure, we come all this way to bust open some alien heads...alright John, we'll wait and see what happens next, but I'm keeping my weapons ready."

John replied, "That's all I can ask, and you can bet your ass that we're keeping our weapons out too."

Susan then suggested, “John, we should bring the rest of the fleet closer to the planet. That way if something unexpected does happen, then at least we’ll be ready to counter it.”

“Indeed,” said John as he backed down in his chair.

In the meantime, Jason was viewing a telescopic view of the planet’s surface on the console directly in front of him. “I’ll be damned,” he said to himself while slowly shaking his head, “now this was *totally* unexpected.”

Chapter eighteen

Aarat quietly pushed a large rock aside and poked his head out of the opening. His initial intent was to acquire some much needed supplies from among the rubble within the city. This had become routine for him. It was the only method of providing for him and the small group of survivors that had stayed protected in the bunker down below. However, he noticed something was different this time as he heard a sound approaching from up above. He looked up and saw the belly of a Grey fighter, this was nothing unusual. He turned to seek refuge from the fighter as thought it was an automatic response. He then noticed that the fighter was being pursued by something else, baring technology and an appearance he had never seen before. Suddenly he couldn't help but notice the strange new craft had fired a weapon of some kind, which destroyed the fighter with ease. He yelled for Hachillah, who moment later appeared before him from the bunker below.

"What is it?" Hachillah asked.

"I am not certain," Aarat answered while pointing at the mysterious fighter, "But it just set blaze to that Imperium fighter in the distance."

Both of them suddenly felt compelled to look up, where they saw what appeared to be the remains of a vast explosion high above where they were standing.

"Something is happening. Get the others, we need to get to a transport," said Aarat in an urgent manner.

"But it may not be safe, you said so yourself," Hachillah replied.

"Nor is it safe to remain here, it is time to move on."

Six humanoids, one of which was a child, began to climb out of the bunker one at a time. A few minutes later, one of them looked back only to take notice of a Grey fighter crashing into the entrance of the bunker that they previously sought refuge in. Seconds after, they took notice of yet another mysterious looking plane that none of them could identify.

"Let's go, there is a transportation facility just two sectors from here." Said Aarat.

A few hours later, a communications officer on board the Excalibur requested John's attention, "This is Alpha Seven, a small craft is attempting to leave the moon's orbit, please advise."

"Does it appear to be of Grey origin?" John asked the pilot over the radio.

“Negative, it’s about the size of one of our fighters. We’ve spotted quite a few of them on the surface.”

“Can you put it on the viewer?” said John while looking to Jason.

“Probably, I’ll use Alpha Seven’s transponder as a reference to its location.”

After a few moments, Jason yelled, “I got it!”

John turned to Susan as she said, “It certainly looks harmless enough. This could be a means of getting some much needed information.”

John turned his head and spoke into his headset, “Alpha Seven, escort the object to our shuttle bay.”

“Roger that, Commander.”

“It appears to be composed of a metallic alloy of some sort, perhaps fermium; the arm should lock to it without a problem. Hope it’s not a suicide bomber,” Jason said sarcastically.

John turned to him and then quickly directed himself back to the monitor and said, “Let’s hope not.”

Two star fighters placed themselves at either side of the alien transport. Their noses were slightly ahead of the craft, guiding it to the larger vessel up ahead. Once the transport was positioned directly beneath the Excalibur, the fighters veered away and headed back to the moon below them. The doors beneath the Excalibur then slid open. An arm of a sort then reached out and seemed to magnetically lock

onto the object resting in space just below them. The arm pulled the craft inside the ship, where the ventral doors closed immediately after doing so.

“Do you think they will harm us?” asked Hachillah.

Aarat responded, “I don’t believe so, if that was their intention I think they would have done so by now.”

As an opening in the craft began to present itself, John and Susan awaited nearby. Several armed Marines waiting impatiently beside them as the door continued to slowly open. Aarat exited the transport by himself, leaving the others behind. The Marines dressed in camouflage quickly pointed their guns at him, as he began to speak in a language nobody nearby could understand. The child who was curiously peaking out the opening from inside the craft immediately ran deeper inside the transport. He soon returned, stepped outside of the craft and approach John. The Marines instantly pointed their guns at him, Aarat moved to protect the young humanoid. The child held out his hand to reveal two necklaces. Each of them contained a crystal-like pendant attached to them.

“It’s just a child John, I think he’s trying to give you something,” said Susan.

John took the pendant with his right hand. The child then handed Aarat the other. Aarat placed it around his neck. John in turn did the

same with the one the boy had handed him as well.

“Let’s hope Jason wasn’t right for once,” John told Susan jokingly. As he placed the necklace around his neck, the gibberish Aarat was speaking slowing started to turn into words that John could understand. He could explain it to himself as though it were some type of telepathic link to his new visitor.

“Hello?” said John to Aarat, feeling awkward as he spoke.

“Greetings, I am Aarat.”

“Susan, we can understand each other,” John said as he turned to her and then quickly directed his attention back to the alien.

Susan stood in aw and she said, “Amazing, what are you waiting for? Try to talk to him.”

“Are you going to harm us?” asked Aarat.

“No, no, of course not. In fact, I think we are just as curious as you are,” John replied.

Aarat signalled the others to exit the transport with his hands. John noticed they looked sick and many had wounds on their hands and faces. He grabbed the portable radio that was attached to his belt and said into it, “Medics to the shuttle bay.”

“Is this your world?” John asked.

Aarat responded, “Yes, this is Nibiru and we are Angarians, did you free us?”

“Yes and no, I suppose we did in a way,” John answered.

"I don't recognize your species or its technology, where are you from?" asked Aarat.

John replied, "We come from a planet called Earth. Is the Grey your enemy as well?"

"Earth, I know of no planet by that designation. If you speak of the Imperium, they have brought much suffering to our world. They are not our friends," he answered.

John then grabbed a pen and notepad from the pocket of his flight suit. He drew a crude image of the sun, along with the first three orbiting planets. He pointed to the third planet and said, "Earth, this is where we are from."

"Ah, the blue planet, we were not aware your level of space flight was as advanced as this," said Aarat.

"Well we come a long way in a very short time, we had to." John said with a chuckle in his voice.

The medics arrived and immediately began examining the crew of the transport. Aarat seemed quite surprised by their efforts.

"Don't worry," John stated, "they are here to help."

Dr. Jennifer Mashburn who was the chief medical officer turned to John and commented, "John, if this creature's anatomy is like our own, then they appear to be suffering from dehydration and malnutrition. We really need to get them to the infirmary to be sure."

John turned to Aarat and explained, "You and your people are in need of medical assistance. Will you allow us to escort all of you to a place where we can take better care of you?"

Aarat looked into John's brown eyes and felt as though he could trust him for some reason. "We will go with you."

John turned to Jennifer who was standing by and said, "He understands, begin helping these *people* to the infirmary." He studied the pendant in detail as the medics and Marines escorted the Angarians outside of the shuttle bay. John then raised his head to see Susan who was clearly observing him and said, "Their friendly. But we need to get them to explain this to the rest of their world. Otherwise there could be false assumptions."

Susan smiled and said, "False assumptions, hmm, you mean like the one *we* made?"

"That is exactly what I mean Susan. We came so close to destroying the surface of that world. A world that was pretty much in the same boat we were in not too long ago."

"But we didn't John, and because of the brave choice that you made, we just might have gained an ally in this war."

John looked at the pendant again as he took it off and held it in his hand, "I hope so, I really do."

Chapter nineteen

Zyron marched through the corridors on his ship, where crewmen glued themselves to the walls clearing his path. He made his way to the bridge of the ship where he was informed of the loss of H-544. He slammed his fists into a nearby console, smashing it completely. Staring coldly at the console now in pieces, he decided to check the repair status of his ship. He was just recently permitted to begin these repairs. Zyron pulled his shroud over his shoulder and entered the ship's guided transport lift. "Operations Unit" he said aloud as the lift's door sealed shut. Upon exiting the lift, several Grey crew members stood to attention as he approached the Operations Master. "Status?" he said plainly to the Operations Master Zul, who wore solid red attire with silver-colored clips around the collar that indicated his rank.

Zul stated, "My lord, repairs are nearly complete. We only lack removing an object of alien origin, it somehow mended itself to the haul."

"What type of object?" Zyron asked.

Zul responded, "We believe it to be a weapon of mass destruction that failed to detonate. It

contains a radioactive element, which we have not seen before. This element may be indigenous to the world it was created on, my lord”.

“Remove it carefully,” Zyron ordered, “I would like to know more of this *weapon*.”

“Yes my lord, of course,” said Zul as Zyron quickly turned and made his way back to the lift.

Moments later, Zyron entered a chamber decorated with several ancient artefacts. His fingers would glide across some type of control panel, triggering a holographic map of the stars to appear before him. The map’s color scheme indicated which systems were under control of the Imperium over a span of one hundred and fifty light years. He used his hand to scroll over to the Sol System. It was represented with a red-dish color different than that of anything else on the map. “Central, why is this star system different than the others?” He said aloud.

A computer sounding voice then spoke to him directly. “This is the Draconis A system, it is deemed to the Imperium as an *observation only* type system.”

Zyron had recalled that the overlords who voted against an invasion of H-551 often referred to it as a forbidden zone. He also remembered one in favor of the invasion making the statement, “We should take it for ourselves while we still can.”

“Observation of what?” he asked.

“Technological capabilities. The inhabitants of the third world of this system are restricted to this system.”

“Restricted by who?”

The computer responded, “The ancient draconian scriptures of Xan.”

“What is this world’s current level of technology?”

“Initial contact revealed the world’s status as non-threatening and in compliance with the ancient draconian scripts of Xan.”

“What is the most current technological status of this world?” Zyron added as he continued to question the computer.

“Unknown due to unforeseen circumstances.”

Growing frustrated at the computer’s responses, he asked, “Why is this world for observation only?” The voice responded, “This planet is reserved for the occupation of the ancient race of Xan.”

“What would happen if this race exceeded the technological limits placed upon them?”

“This planet would be taken by the ancient race of Xan.”

“Why can we not merely destroy the inhabitants of this world now?”

The computer replied, “The race inhabiting this planet protects this planet from unforeseen possibilities, until the world can be taken by the ancient race of Xan.

“And what will happen to the existing inhabitants of this world once it is taken by the ancient race of Xan?” Zyron asked.

The computer answered, “Any level of advancement that brings about the re-taking of this planet will result in the extinction of its species.”

“Where is the ancient race of Xan?”

“The second planet of the Alpha-Draconis B system,” it replied.

“Do we have any tactical information of this world?” he asked.

“This information is restricted pending the rebirth of the Draconian Empire,” it said as strange red lettering began flashing over the display.

“Show me the territories owned by the Draconian Empire,” Zyron requested.

The coloring on the map then changed to cover all of the stars contained within it. Included were all the worlds currently controlled by the Imperium, in addition to the Sol system.

“How does the ancient race of Xan acquire such a massive territory?”

“By means of the last species created by the ancient race of Xan. Further details have been classified by the Supreme Overlord.”

“Interesting,” Zyron said to himself as he waved his hand, which in effect caused the hologram to fade. He began was curious to what relation the inhabitants of H-551 had with the decedents of his own species. He thought to him

self, “What is so special about this world? Why do the ancients wish to keep it for themselves? Could it contain secrets that would result in a superior power? I must take this world and unlock its secrets for myself.”

While he considered this, he realized that he could not simply ignore the restrictions that the Council had imposed on him. He continued to ask himself questions. “Just what are they hiding? Why the deviation from the orders given to us by the ancients? Why was I not informed of this?”

Chapter twenty

Nibiru Orbit, Sol System

John walked into the infirmary and flagged down Dr. Mashburn. She then approached him after setting down a platter that contained several syringes. He said to her, "Can they be questioned?"

"I think so. They appear to be fine physically. I've provided them each with a nutritional supplement. However, their mental state of mind is a different story. They all seem to be suffering from some type of post-traumatic stress disorder. That aspect of their condition can only be treated with time. I need to show you something if you have a few minutes." she replied.

They disappeared into a small room that was isolated from the rest of the infirmary. She hit a few keys on a keyboard. Afterwards an image appeared on the screen directly in front of them. It's contents revealed a strand of DNA. She turned to him and said, "This is a representation

of the DNA that we've extracted from the aliens, I mean our *guests*."

"Go on," said John as he viewed the twenty-two inch LCD monitor.

She tapped a few more keys on the keyboard. A second strand of DNA then appeared below the first one. "This is the DNA strand of your typical human male, note the consistencies."

"They look almost identical," John commented while rubbing his chin.

The doctor explained, "Almost, but not quite. In humans, about 99 percent of our DNA is identical. The remaining one percent provides us with different height, hair, eye color and other factors that make us distinct from one another."

"Right, I remember this from biology," said John.

"Well, our visitors' DNA is about 95 percent identical to our own. The differences in this case would be their height, lack of hair on their heads and other factors. This is probably the result of circumstantial evolution and natural immunity. For example, the fact that they're taller than many humans is probably due to the fact that their world is simply more massive than our own. They simply need longer *and* stronger legs in comparison to our own. Something else I noticed. This x-ray shows a separate passage from the nose to the lungs. This means that they do not have to rely on a single passage for air-flow as we do. Their teeth are also not as well

defined as our own. I think evolution took a slightly different path with these people at some point in their history. Basically, we might be able to chew our food better than them, but they are incapable of choking to death should an object get lodged in their throat,” she explained.

John studied the view on the monitor and then asked, “So are you saying we are the same race?”

She went on to explain, “Honestly John, I don’t know. I mean at one point we just might have been. But somewhere down the line that changed. Probably due to natural selection and the evolutionary process that took place on their own world. There is not one single theory that could explain these differences. There are a number of theories on this. Evolutionary design, survival of the fittest, the list goes on. But at this point I would be afraid to even speculate. I *do* know that there are two possibilities that come to mind. Either Natural selection ends up with the same conclusion when it comes to the fittest life form on any given planet, or we were related at some point in evolutionary history. In any case, they are more like us than we are of that of say, a Neanderthal. They reproduce like us and from what I’ve gathered, they even act like us. If you want my personal opinion, even though I’m not a professional in the field, I would say we could be looking at a missing evolutionary link.”

“Your hypothesis makes sense Doctor, but the Grey...they look nothing like us,” John pointed out.

“That’s the second thing I wanted to discuss with you. After looking at the Angarians I decided to re-examine a few Grey corpses that we had here in the freezer. It is true, they don’t share near the resemblance that this new species does. *But*, take this into consideration. They have two arms and two legs. They have a head, ears to hear with and eyes in which to see with. But I did notice one major thing that makes them different from ourselves and the Angarian people,” said Dr. Mashburn.

“Which is?” John queried in a curious tone.

The doctor replied, “The differences in DNA from Grey to Grey are even closer than from one human to the next. It is even closer than cultures that were participated in inbreeding many years back. We have a father and a mother that makes our one percent difference quite extraordinary but obviously possible thanks to the natural equation of selectivity. To put it simple John, it looks like nearly every single Grey specimen we’ve looked at would in fact, have not only the same parents, but have been cut from the exact same genetic source and material.”

John rubbed his chin again while his eyes roll around in thought, “So are you saying they have a single king and queen that they are all born from?”

“I considered that possibility, but not even that would explain why the DNA structures are so close. Finally I came to only one conclusion. The Grey are clones John, or at least the ones that we’ve looked at so far,” she said.

“Clones from what?” asked John.

The doctor answered, “Your guess is as good as mine. But from I can tell, it wasn’t from another Grey being. It was from something far different. It is as if natural evolution had no role whatsoever in helping them become what they are today. That being the case, I would have to assume that all of the Grey that I’ve examined were engineered for some special purpose. For example, look at their eyes and skin. They have retinas and melanin levels that can adapt to any number of planetary conditions. Hot or cold, dim or bright, it makes no difference to them. This is probably why their eyes are so large, to allow for the retina to collect large levels of light in near dark conditions. Their eyelids are also extremely thick, meaning they can limit how much light can enter the eye when faced with extremely bright conditions. When I got to analysing their lungs I found the same thing. They can breathe air that contains very strong amounts of oxygen, or air that contains as little as three percent oxygen. A species such as this would not naturally evolve on any single planet. It would be more likely that they were built to survive under any given number of environ-

mental conditions. Even the way their immune systems have evolved support this possibility. It could fight off so much as the common cold before the replication process would even begin. This is something even humans are incapable of doing at this point and time despite how long we've had to adapt. In theory, a human being can adapt to a nuclear explosion if it happened slow enough, over several hundred years I mean. But these guys don't seem to have to evolve to accommodate for any given natural environment. It's as if they are already pre-evolved for any number of conditions directly out of the box."

"Well we know they haven't adapted to nukes quite yet," said John in a failed attempt to get the Doctor to crack a smile.

She led John to a freezer and pulled out a drawer containing the body of a frozen Grey corpse. She lifted up the lip of the corps and continued her explanation, "Take notice of the sharp teeth?"

John slowly turned his head in disgust and said *yes*.

The doctor carried on, "We are looking at the perfect predator. Long ago, we may have had jaws such as these, but provided our way of life, evolution no longer saw its use. Teeth such as these were abandoned during the evolutionary process. Probably because we had learned to cook and tenderise our food before eating it. We

no longer have a need for our vermiform appendix for the same reason. If these beings had evolved naturally, given their level of technology, they would not have teeth such as these. In fact, they probably wouldn't have any teeth at all since they appear to live on a liquid diet. I'm a religious person John, so forgive me for putting it this way. But the all mighty that created us didn't make these creatures, something else did."

John's portable radio then began emitting a repetitive tone. He picked it up and said into it, "Stone here."

On the other end was Jason who said, "John, we've got company. I am seeing three mother ships from the moon; they appear to be of the same origin as our guests.

John instantly replied, "Have they indicated any threat to us?"

"If they fire the weapon that put a hole in that ship back around Earth they would. But so far they are just sitting there. It's as though they are waiting for us to respond."

John turned to the doctor and said, "This is all fascinating Doctor, but I really need to talk to the group's leader."

Chapter twenty-one

Excalibur
Nibiru Orbit, Sol System

Dr. Mashburn showed John the way to Aarat's cot and pulled back a curtain where he laid. Upon taking notice of John's presence, Aarat sat up to greet him. John put on the necklace that acted as some type of telepathic translator and said, "How are you feeling Aarat?"

Aarat replied, "Much better, thank you for your kind attention to our needs."

"A couple ships from your world have approached us. We are unsure of their intentions. I was hoping you could help us to communicate and smooth things over with them."

"Of course," said Aarat, "but I'll need to address them from my transport. I'm not sure if your communications technology can effectively communicate with them."

"What makes you so sure?" John asked.

Aarat answered, "Because we tried to contact you prior to our arrival. We believe our transmission was unrecognised."

John nodded to him and said, "No problem, can you walk okay?"

“I believe so, I assume the others will be safe here?” he asked.

John said jokingly, “So long as your people don’t fire on us then we will all be just fine.”

Aarat smiled, which caught John’s attention. He was pleased to see that the Angarians could produce an emotional response. John aided Aarat to his shuttle. Aarat insisted that John stay side by side with him as he fiddled with some of the shuttle’s controls. John asked him why he felt it necessary for him to stand so close.

“Our communications allow for both Audio and Visual communication. I feel it best that you be seen for who you appear to be,” he replied.

John commented, “We have such communication on Earth, but for some reason we don’t have it on our ships, not sure why.”

John used his radio to ask his pit crew to monitor any and all frequencies that left the transport. Despite this, nothing was detected on traditional bands during the course of the transmission.

“This is Aarat, flight director for Aztec city. A small unit and myself are currently aboard the vessel that stands before you. Please respond.”

A three dimensional holographic view then appeared before them. “This is Commander Val aboard the Nibiru ship Dekul. We have detected your transport, please advise us of your current situation.”

Aarat replied, "We are in no danger. We are hosted by the species from the third world. They are treating us well."

Val responded with curiosity, "Did you say the third world, how is that possible?"

John, still wearing the pendant, answered in Aarat's place. "It is a long story, but your people are safe here. They're free to leave anytime they want."

"We assume it is your species which overcome our captures then?" Val asked.

Aarat replied, "That appears to be the case, Commander."

Val thought about it a moment as though he were in disbelief, "Tell them that they may remain in our space until further notice. However, I do ask if they can recall their fighters from down below. The Imperium threat appears to be over for the moment. We are grateful, but the visitors' presence is unnerving to many of the people on the surface."

John picked up his radio and said into it, "This is Stone, please ask the Enterprise carrier to recall the fighters."

Susan queried, "Is something wrong John?"

John responded, "Negative. Something appears to be right for a change."

Aarat turned back to the hologram and said, "They have complied with the request."

Val turned his head away from the communicator for a moment. He took notice Earth's

Dark Angels leaving on a course for the Enterprise Carrier. "Aarat, we are looking forward to hearing about your experience aboard the alien vessel."

Aarat responded, "They do not appear to be that alien to us. They appear to be human. We are in good health and will depart once those in my group are able to do so."

"Interesting, have your biological needs been met?" Val asked.

Aarat replied, "Their methods are crude, but effective."

"Very well, you are clear to dock with the Dekul upon departure from the *human* ship. You will then be taken to the surface where our chancellor and his companions have questions. Inform the humans that should they remain, we will be in contact with them following the deliberations."

Once the channel was closed, John asked Aarat, "So what do you think?"

Aarat answered, "Though I can't speak for all of my people, I believe you will be considered a friend to most of them. I will attempt to convey the hospitalities that you've shown to us. As of now, I must ask that you allow us to leave the ship."

John said, "Not a problem," as he reached for his radio to relay the request to his crew.

Chapter twenty-two

**Mt. Krar, Varren
Sirius B System**

Just over Eight and one half light years from Earth, only a bright flash of light could be seen over the city. It followed with a horrific cloud that took the form of a mushroom, just moments after the explosion. Entire structures present just minutes now laid scattered throughout the surface in ruins. The Council high above remained unaffected. However, the city below instantly turned into a lifeless wasteland in the aftermath of the enormous blast. This explosion could easily be seen by the Supremacy, in orbit high above the planet. Aturos took notice of it immediately after the communication array became flooded with activity. The city seemed to have been under attack, but there was no sign of an attacker. Acts of Terror were unheard of on this world, and the weapon used was nothing that Aturos had ever seen before.

“Shipmaster, what is happening?” Aturos quickly questioned.

“My lord, our city has been attacked,” said the Ship Master. “One-hundred twenty sectors around the city have been destroyed. I have detecting very high amounts of radiation.”

“Impossible! The grid would have detected an enemy the moment they approached the star system,” said Aturos.

The shipmaster replied, “Yes my lord, but the weapon used was not of our own technology.”

Aturos knew things did not add up, he ordered the Shipmaster to sweep the entire region, “If an outside source is at work here, I want confirmation of that.”

“Yes my lord.”

“A crewman at another station then said to Aturos, “An emergency council meeting as been ordered. Your highness’s presence is requested.”

Aturos quickly turned around and left the bridge. Moments later, he had entered a large chamber where he took seat. It was surrounded with large screens at least five foot tall. One by one, each would display the image of a single council member onto the screen. Zyron was the first to speak in outrage, “I recognize this weapon, and it belongs to the inhabitants of H-551. They are the *only* species which has the resources to build a weapon such as this!”

Another Overlord spoke, “Impossible. That race does not even have the technology, to leave

it's *own* star system. Let alone, evade our defense net."

"You forget, we've lost control of the world labeled H-544. They *must* be conspiring with the humans. They *do* have the means to make the journey," Zyron replied.

"Correction, *you* lost H-544, Zyron! This council does not yet have enough information to draw any type of conclusion regarding this incident." said Aturos.

"Incident," Zyron yelled, "you call *this*, an incident? This is a *very* cunning race. If there was ever a way to deal us a crippling blow such as this, then they would find it!"

Another member of the council who went by the name of Lord Kdem then said, "We were warned by the ancient scripts of Xan not to make any attempt to invade that world. This could be the act of the ancients. This could be our punishment for deviating from their plans."

"Our founders could care less about us," Zyron said as he slammed his fist down. "Has nobody here considered what will become of us should they return as the scriptures suggest? They are having us build *their* Empire, not our own. Regardless of who planted the weapon, so long as H-551 exists, our own existence is threatened. Don't take my word for it, check the information contained in Central. The Draconians wish to claim this world for *themselves*, for the *awesome* power it obviously contains."

Aturos replied, “Zyron you’re manipulating the facts as usual. We all know you have a grudge against this race due to your *obvious* inability to dominate them. The return of the Draconian Empire is not set to take place for millennia, long after our ability to reproduce will likely dissipate. Fellow council members, we cannot allow ourselves to be distracted by Zyron’s interpretation of this event. We should remain calm and analyse the facts collectively.”

“Aturos makes sense. We should not leap without knowing where we intend to land,” said Kdem.

“I disagree, we should destroy the world deemed H-541 and eliminate the threat they obviously pose to the Imperium,” said another Overlord from his designated screen.

Zyron yelled over the others in deliberation, “While this council bickers about what action should be taken next, they could be preparing for yet another attack! We need action, not words to *protect* our *very* survival.”

Zyron’s monitor then went black, as did several others. Kdem spoke as though he were addressing Aturos directly, “We cannot allow this event to destroy a council that has existed for generations upon generations. We *must* fulfil our destiny.”

“There may be no way to prevent it,” said Aturos, “Zyron is simply fulfilling his own destiny it seems. But he’s doing so far earlier than

any of us had anticipated. These events should not be unfolding for several generations of him to come.”

Kdem’s monitor then began to flicker prior to going black, followed by the remaining monitors that were still active. Suddenly Aturos was knocked down by a jolt of force that seemed to have originated from outside the ship. As he pulled himself back up, he activated an external monitor only to take notice of the fleet opening fire upon itself. He turned and rushed to the bridge of his ship.

As he entered the bridge, the Shipmaster immediately addressed Aturos. “My lord, Zyron and several other vessels have opened fire on the supremacy.

“Return fire!” The Overlord ordered. A console then flashed to alert him that there was an incoming transmission. He glided his hand over a panel to respond.

It was Kdem stating, “We are taking damage! The ships under fire cannot....”

Aturos then noticed Kdem’s ship preparing to explode from all of the concentrated firepower being thrown at it. He then said out loud, “Alert the other ships on a private channel to retreat to the Ross system.”

“But my lord...”

“Follow my orders! We’ll have to fall back and regroup *after* all sides have been chosen in this conflict. This was clearly a series of events

carefully planned some time ago. We will return in greater numbers to reclaim the Council.”

Several ships then turned to face the same point in space. Then they instantly vanished from the site where the battle was taking place. Zyron, with most of the fleet now following his command, took notice of this and said to himself, “Run Aturos, run...like the coward that you are.”

Chapter twenty-three

Angelis Vessel, Nibiru Orbit

After a thorough deliberation, the Angarian Council finally made a decision. They agreed to provide the humans on planet Earth with specific technologies. In exchange, they requested that the fleet from Earth remain in orbit, while the Angarians renewed their defensive capabilities. This was a fair arrangement since the Imperium had done a great deal of damage to the Moon's defenses. It had taken several hours for the offer to reach Earth through normal methods of communication. Once it arrived, it wasn't long before the offer was graciously accepted, by majority vote of the United Nations. It took several more hours for the outcome of the vote to reach the Excalibur in orbit around Nibiru. John, Jason and Susan were invited to the Angarian ship Angelis, to discuss the details of the agreement. They approached the massive flagship in a graviton built shuttle with Jason Jones at the helm.

"So Jason, you have any idea where the welcome mat is?" said John as the Angelis was scanned for openings.

Jason replied, "I have no idea to be honest. They could have sent us some instructions you know."

"How did the shuttle of refugees get in?" Susan asked.

Jason answered, "I don't know, I wasn't paying attention. I was busy fixing a small leak in one of the rings."

They drew closer and closer to the ship when Jason suddenly said, "Uh, I'm not longer in control of the craft."

"Have our maneuvering thrusters failed?" John queried.

Susan then pointed to the view port, "I don't think so John, look."

A bright light appeared as an opening presented itself to the trio. The shuttle slowly guided itself inside the ship and easily set down while a set of large doors closed behind it. Blue lights above the doors flashed consistently until they finally sealed shut. John approached the exit until he was quickly intercepted by Jason, who said, "Hold on John, the air out there is...oh, never mind. For a moment there I thought you were walking into a vacuum."

The three walked down the shuttle's ramp where they were approached by two Angarian males and one Angarian female. The tallest of the men stood about six foot five with the crystal blue eyes. The female stood five foot ten, with no hair on her head. These seemed to be com-

mon traits throughout the species. The tallest of the three was the first to speak. "My label is Ambassador Tyran. This is Science Specialist Kara and her assistant Jac."

"You speak our language," Susan said abruptly.

Tyran replied, "A few Angarians such as ourselves learned your language cycles ago in the event we ever made contact."

"But how? I mean as far as we know, we are the first that have ever even met an Angarian." She asked.

Jac who stood about six foot one replied, "By means of video broadcasts emitted from your planet."

John then looked at Tyran and said, "I hope we were not judged by our TV shows."

Tyran responded, "At first we did not know what to think of it. But we later realized that much of it was a form of recreation of some sort. From it we learned initially that your culture is warlike. For this reason, we were unable to make contact with your race."

Jason seemed bothered by Tyran's comments and blurted, "That warlike nature along with our big Kahunas is what saved your asses."

John immediately put his arm in front of Jason and said, "Easy, these are our friends. We are guests here."

Kara quickly saw through Jason's frustration and said in a soft voice, "We also learned your

culture is capable of a great many wonderful things. It contains wonderful traits that many species tend to lack.”

Susan threw her hand out and asked, “How many other *intelligent* races are out here?”

Kara answered, “We know of forty-two in our corner of the galaxy. But some are direct descendants from us, colonies that formed after we were forced to flee our home world.”

“So if this isn’t your home planet, then where are you from?” John asked

Kara replied, “It was destroyed long ago by natural causes. Long before your world became habitable. At the time a planet still existed between the fourth and fifth planets of this system.”

John looked down and said, “I’m sorry to hear that.”

Tyran smiled and said, “All worlds come to an end eventually. Our descendants considered settling on the Fourth Planet, which once was home to a vast ocean. Fortunately they noticed that the planet was slipping away from the star before any plans were made. We were fortunate to find Nibiru. Come, we have much to discuss.”

Jason began looking around the inside of the ship in amazement once they left the area that the shuttle had landed in. They entered what appeared to be an engine room where Jac said, “I have to ask that you avoid physical contact with

any objects in this area without consulting with one of us first...”

Jason quickly pulled his hand back from a nearby device while Jac continued, “Some items here can harm you.”

They approached what appeared to be a table. Upon further study, they noticed that it contained some controls and a type of monitor after looking down into it. Kara looked at John and said, “We are curious. Your propulsion systems appear to hold much in common with that of the Imperium.”

“And how do you know that?” Jason asked with scepticism.

Tyran replied, “Do not be alarmed. It is standard procedure to scan any vessel that we should approach.”

There were several Angarian people working around them. John leaned towards Susan and whispered, “Do they all speak English?”

“With the exception of these three, all I’m hearing is gibberish from *those* guys. That thing must still be working,” she said as she pointed to the pendent around John’s neck.

“Jason was then heard asking Kara, “So what method of propulsion do you use?”

Kara responded, “For local space travel, it works by mass reduction similar to your own method. The implementation is different though. But for interstellar travel we use something far more effective.”

Jason rolled his eyes around a second asked, "Did you say interstellar?"

"Of course, provided the vast amount of space between stars, it would take hundreds of years to get any where," she said.

Jason looked at Susan and said, "But we can't travel faster than our current means, it is scientifically impossible based on what we know."

Kara continued, "Technically you are right. A ship cannot travel faster than a beam of light..."

Jason looked back at Susan and said, "You see, I told you."

"...but space itself can." Kara said, completing her sentence. We've concluded this after viewing the galaxies that were the first to form following the explosion which resulted in our creation."

Jason put his head down a moment while Susan gave him a strange look. "Damn it!" he said.

Jac looked at Jason and said, "Due to the differences between our two technologies, it may be easier to explain the effect. This *may* allow you to find a way to integrate it into your own technology."

Kara looked down at the screen in front of them and began to operate several controls. She explained, "In order to create the distortion in space, you will need to manipulate gravity

enough to expand space in back of the craft while contracting it in front."

"That would require the use of negative mass, this has been thought of before but we were unsure of its existence," Jason said openly.

"It exists," Jac said, "and it's fairly easy to create with the necessary equipment. Here are the details. We took the liberty of translating the information for you." He handed Jason a pad that was flat and contained a screen that was sensitive to the touch.

As Kara, Jac and Jason continued to babble on technical terms, Tyran motioned for John and Susan to step aside for an isolated discussion.

"So what do you know of the Imperium?" Tyran asked.

"The Imperium? Oh, you mean the Grey, very little. I was hoping you could tell us a little bit more about them," John answered.

"They threatened our world once before many cycles ago, but at that time we were able to reach an agreement," he explained.

"What type of agreement?" Susan asked.

"One of our greatest achievements is interfacing technology with our minds. We didn't know why they wanted it until recent events," Tyran said

John questioned, "Is this what they use to control the minds of their victims?"

Tyran responded, "The technology has been heavily modified, but yes we believe so."

“So you gave it to them and they just left?” Susan asked.

Tyran continued, “There was another condition, one which made us feel more at ease with the agreement. They needed us to notify them if *your* race ever evolved to the point of leaving this star system.”

John responded, “Wait, let me get this straight, so they basically left you alone on the condition that you kept an *eye* on us? To what extent?”

“We would occasionally briefly visit the blue planet. Most of the information could be obtained by simply viewing your broadcasts from as far as we mentioned earlier. The Imperium attempts to learning about you were far more extreme, however. They would take your people for experimentation. By agreeing to their terms, we minimized their need to do such research.”

“Why the interest in our race? I’m not ashamed to admit that on the grand scale of things, we’re pretty primitive.” Susan asked.

Tyran said, “We do not know. We believe it’s more about your planet than it is your people. We have also considered the possibility that they might consider your race a threat to them in some way. But if this were true, it would seem they would have just destroyed you instead.

John queried, “So what happened to the agreement?”

“Again, we do not know. They approached us with several ships and took control of our world. We did not have the time to understand why,” he said.

“But you have ships that appear to be just as advanced as their own. Could you not resist them?” Susan questioned.

Tyran responded, “We are not a warlike culture, nor have we been for several centuries. We have defending vessels, but we had little time to get many of them off the surface. Somehow, despite your technical limitations, you were able to stand against them. This may have some relevance as to why they insist your technology remain limited.”

“So until now, they didn’t want to kill us but at the same time they wanted to keep us in the dark. It doesn’t make sense,” John commented.

Jason and the others then joined them. “Well I think I’m done here,” he said.

John then nodded to each of the Angarians, “I suppose we need to get back to our ship. We thank you for your hospitality and if you need anything then just let us know.”

“Of course,” Tyran said in reply.

Chapter twenty-four

Atlanta, Georgia
United States, Earth

An eleven-year-old girl sat quietly in a room. She watched a television that she shared with about a half dozen other children. Her appearance was thin, with dark brown eyes. Her long brown hair rested over her pink T-shirt. As the cartoon that they were watching came to an end, a news anchor appeared in the corner of the screen. The anchor revealed scenes for that night's television news broadcast.

"Daddy!" she cried while running towards the television set. A nearby nurse rushed to see what was wrong.

"That's my daddy," said little girl. She continued to point non-stop towards the television screen. The grey haired nurse called, "Dr. Louis, I need you."

Several hours later on board the Excalibur, we found Jason and Susan preparing to test a tachyon based communication system. It's design schematics were among several contained

in the tablet that Jason had acquired from the Angarians.

“When will we know if it works?” she asked.

Jason answered, “It’s done on our end, we’ll just have to wait for Earth to send us a transmission, after they finish up over there.”

“So if this works, this will allow us to communicate with Earth in real time?”

Jason responded, “Yep, supposed to. Although I haven’t done anything as far as video goes, but the audio side of it should work something like that.”

“Amazing, I wonder how it works.” said Susan

Jason attempted to explain, “Where our conventional system uses radio waves, these tachyons particles supposedly move faster than light, in fact they cannot move any slower than that. This was theorized to be possible a long time ago, we just didn’t know if the particles existed or not. The Angarian design somehow...”

Jason was then interrupted by a beeping sound coming from the unit. “What’s that mean?” Susan quickly asked as a blue light continued to blink on and off.

“Means we have a phone call, would you like to do the honors?” Jason replied.

Susan pushed him out of the way and picked up a microphone. “Excalibur, Cole speaking,” she said before releasing the button on the side of the microphone.

“This is Sterling, UN Command. It appears our new toy works,” said a male voice over the speaker.

“I suppose it does,” Susan noted.

Sterling said, “Well the timing couldn’t have been better, is John around by chance?”

Susan picked up her portable radio with her left hand still holding the microphone in her right and said, “John, could you come here please?”

John’s voice answered on the radio, “Sure, I was about to head that way, be there in a second.”

As John walked into the room, Susan handed him the microphone and said, “It’s for you, it’s Sterling.”

“Hey, you got it working, nice. Stone here,” he said into the microphone.

“Hi John, you might want to sit down,” said Sterling.

“Why, what’s up?” John asked.

Sterling replied, “They found Jessica, she’s in an orphanage just outside of Atlanta. She’s alive and well. You’re clear to return home on the Excalibur. Some of your crew will need to transfer to the Challenger to continue work on the upgrades.”

John slowly seated himself as he passed the microphone to Jason. “This is great news,” Susan said to John as she placed her hand on his left shoulder.

“Yes it is,” said John. Susan took noticed of his eyes beginning to water.

A few hours later John picked up his headset to speak with Susan, who was now on board the Challenger.

“We are preparing to head out, Harrison will be in charge of the fleet. Make sure Jason finishes those upgrades, I’ll see to it the same is done to the other ships back home,” John said in a cheerful voice.

Susan replied, “We’ll take care of it, say hello to Jessica for me.”

Atlanta, GA.

Two Days Later...

John walked into a two-story building, where Dr. Steen approached him. Steen was the child psychologist who had been caring for Jessica.

“John Stone I presume,” she said shaking his hand.

“That’s me, where is she?” he said anxiously.

“There are a few things we’ll need to discuss, follow me,” said the doctor

She swiped her card through a device above the door handle and then entered a room. There, John looked through a window where he saw Jessica in the room adjacent to him. She was sitting in front of a television screen watching the news.

“Can she see us?” he asked.

“No,” said Dr. Steen quietly with her arms crossed.

“Shouldn’t she be watching something else?” John queried.

The Doctor explained, “She’s actually been here for some time, we had no idea who she was. She never said much of anything until recently, when she saw your face on the news. She claimed that you were her *Daddy*. At first we weren’t sure, but the nurse on duty noticed the resemblance, so we contacted the military. They told us that you were away on a mission. After we explained the situation, they allowed us to perform a paternity test using a sample of DNA that they had on record. Once it was confirmed, we asked them to contact you. We felt it best not to inform Jessica until you actually arrived. The girl has apparently been through a lot, like many of the other kids here who lost touch with their parents. We wanted to make sure that you could make it, before getting her hopes up. This seemed like the right thing to do. We don’t get many cases where the parent is on the other side of the solar system. She’s been watching the news ever since, we assume she’s hoping to catch another glimpse of you.”

“I see. Well, I’m here now.”

“That you are, let’s get you in there,” Dr. Steen said with a smile.

The Doctor slowly opened the door to the room that Jessica was in. “Jessica, somebody is here to see you. She turned around to see who it was. She was not sure whom to expect since it had been so long since she felt the touch of family. Once she saw John walk through the door, it took her less than a second to make the connection.

“Daddy!” she cried. She ran towards him with near instantaneous tears in here eyes.

John held the eleven year old in his arms and hugged her tight.

“The TV said you were in space all this time fighting aliens, is that true?” she asked while wiping her tears.

“Yes it is, but not *always* fighting aliens. We found some friendly ones out there too. I’m so glad I found you,” he said

“That is so awesome! Oh and I’m glad you found me too,” she said as she while grinner ear to ear.

“So are we going home?” Jessica asked.

John had to think about this a moment. Since the invasion, his home had either been at Graviton Industries or on a military base. More recently, it has been on a spaceship. Despite all this, there was just one clear way to answer. “Yes, we’re going home.”

John was very happy to see her, and so glad she opened up to him with such ease. He was

hesitant to ask a question that has been on his mind so soon, but he felt he had to do just that.

“Umm, Jessica, what happened to Mom?” he asked in an easy voice.

Jessica looked down for a moment, then looked back up at him and said, “They took her.”

This was not the response that John was hoping for. But it was more hopeful than the answer his worst fears have provided him with. This brought him to the next question.

“Took her, took her where honey?” he asked.

“Up there,” she said as she pointed up. Then she looked quickly up at John with a smile and said out of excitement, “But you have a spaceship, right? We can go look for her!”

John thought about what she said a minute. Deep down he knew that these were most likely just the false hopes of a little girl. Nevertheless, they were still hopes. He looked at her and said, “Sure we can go look for her baby. We can search the *entire* universe if we have to, sure. What do you say we get outta here?”

“I think that’s a great idea!” she said as John carried her out of the room. They walked out of the building and got into the SUV that once belonged to her grandfather.

John didn’t have a traditional home, and he couldn’t bare the thought of leaving his daughter with a nanny while he skipped across space. He also knew that he would have to tell her

about the death of her grandfather among other things. Before that though, the best thing he felt should be done, was to become reacquainted with his long lost child. To let her know what had happened in the last couple years, and to reassure her that he will do everything in his power to keep from losing her again.

Chapter twenty-five

H-532 Orbit
Ross System

As the Supremacy closed its approach to the world of H-532, a control ship in orbit around the planet entered onto the main view screen.

"I want to speak to the commander of that ship," said Aturos.

The Grey being immediately replied, "Yes My Lord. Lord Zeth is awaiting your response."

Aturos waved his hand, causing a holographic image to appear before him. "Zeth, are you familiar with the mess Zyron has made?"

"I am. You took some risk coming here. I have orders to fire on you without hesitation," he replied.

"Is that your intention?" Aturos questioned.

Zeth replied, "Negative, I am aware of the situation. I will provide any assistance that I can in regaining order. As you may recall, I supported your stance in regards to H-551."

"I remember, I assumed you might be of understanding. Invading that world could have

and still may bring about the end of our vast Empire,” said Aturos.

Zeth asked, “Do you have a plan?”

“Not as of yet,” Aturos replied, “we are damaged and outnumbered. I am confident that Zyron will however carry out his threat on the forbidden planet. We believe the humans and Angarians have joined forces. But that will not be enough based on our latest intelligence.”

“H-532 has been a success, their technology is very limited. This is obvious at the lack of equipment in their orbit. Nevertheless, a capital ship must remain here to maintain our influence,” said Zeth.

“Negative,” Aturos said, “our empire is at stake. This planet is small compared to that. It would be best to have your ship release control to join my fleet.”

“Are you certain of this?” Zeth queried.

Aturos replied, “I am. I believe Zyron’s embedded program has been activated prematurely. But it is not functioning, as we believed it would. Though he appears to have no recollection of his purpose, he has proven to be a grave threat to the Imperium.”

“Very well,” said Zeth, “I will recall our fighters and prepare to leave orbit.”

Meanwhile near the Imperium home world, Zyron sat aboard his ship as final repairs were made.

“Lord Zyron, some of the shipmasters are in doubt in regards to recent events. They question your orders,” said the ship master aboard the Incursive.

Zyron replied, “We do not have time for this. They can join us or be put to death.”

“What of Aturos?” he asked.

“He is weak. He would be a fool to even attempt a strike against us. What we do is to preserve the glory of the Empire. If *you* question me again, I will see to it you are put to death along with the others.”

He responded, “Very good My Lord, my apologies.”

Zyron then stared into empty space when suddenly a burst of flashes began to enter his mind. The flashes contained that of a reptile like species he had not seen. He saw himself out of body, laying on a table while they watched over him. The flash then changed to a species which resembled his own, but were smaller in physical form. A massive war then appeared before him containing ships he also did not recognize. He witnessed a close up of the Polaris star, which grew smaller as though he were backing away from it. He felt as though he remembered these events, yet had no familiarity with what was taking place. Suddenly, reality took over.

His attention then turned to the view screen where a control ship slowly sailed across in a ro-

tating motion. He turned to the shipmaster and said, “What is our status?”

“My Lord. We are in the process of fuelling and arming the fleet. The damage to the surface has also caused delays, the cloning facilities are currently offline.” replied the shipmaster.

Zyron responded anxiously, “Tell them to move faster!”

“Yes my lord, right away!”

Chapter twenty-six

Challenger Vessel
Nibiru Orbit, Sol

“How’s it going with those shield emitters,” Jason said over the radio.

Seth replied, “Almost done here. As for the rest of the fleet back home, they have completed approximately twenty-five percent of the work. They estimate a few days before getting them installed onto all of the vessels.”

“You up for a real world test?” Jason inquired.

“If its okay with Harrison its okay with me,” Seth responded.

Several minutes later, the Relinquent approached the Challenger ship only to stop just one half kilometer away from it.

“You ready over there?” Harrison asked over the radio.

“Ready as we’ll ever be,” replied Susan on board the Challenger.

She then turned to Jason and said, “These things better work.”

Jason showing a small look of concern said, "Me too, the emitters worked fine in the lab though. If they fail to work as planned, I can assure you that we'll be the first to know."

The Relinquent then exposed a single cannon from beneath its haul. It fired a steady burst of energy onto the Challenger's ventral haul.

"The shield seems to be absorbing the blast. Power drain is at seven percent per second in that section," Jason noted while looking at his console.

Susan's eyes widened as she said, "Impressive."

Harrison was then heard over the ship's radio, "You still over there?"

"Affirmative," Susan replied, "let's take it to the next level."

A launcher then exposed itself on the Relinquent. This was followed by the launch of a single missile, which impacted the Challenger's port side. The bridge crew experienced a jolt of force, whereby Susan had to grab onto a nearby chair to remain stationary. She turned to Jason, whereby Jason commented, "I figured it would be normal to feel the impact of something solid hitting the shield. It's still holding though with no damage to the haul. It would seem that the energy weapons put work on the emitters, while projectiles tend to shake things up a bit."

Jason then made contact with the Relinquent. "We're good here, it's just as we'd expected."

“Roger that,” replied Harrison, “it’s been fun firing on you.”

The Relinquent’s weapon ports then turned to fold back inside of the haul, while the ship slowly backed away from the Challenger.

Later that evening, Jason lay in his cot while reviewing the space distortion technology contained in the pad given to him by Jac. “How is this supposed to work?” he said to himself before placing the pad down. He then looked at a stack of books and noticed the MPAR reference manual. He pulled the book out from under the stack. While flipping through the pages, he landed on a chapter labelled *Important Safety Guidelines*. He turned a page where he noticed some text contained inside a yellow caption box. It read, “*It is important to ensure that each of the diodes are properly installed to prevent a reverse plasma flow effect. Failing to do so may result in serious damage, injury or death.*”

Jason suddenly hopped out of bed and put on his slippers while throwing on a long white over coat. The next morning, Susan entered the section of the ship containing the Mercury Plasma Acceleration Rings. She saw Jason standing on a ladder with half his body hidden inside an opening in the ceiling.

“Jason is that you?” she said, looking up in an attempt to see what he was doing.

“One second, ouch!” he cried as sparks flew out from around the opening. As he began to

step down the ladder Susan could not help but notice that he was still wearing his Pajamas.

"They said you might be up here, casual attire today?" she said jokingly.

He looked down at his clothes and then at her and said, "I think I figured out how to do it."

"How to do what?" she asked.

"Distort space," he answered.

Susan queried, "You've been up all night, haven't you? What are you talking about?"

"What Kara was talking about, their means of interstellar travel," he said with excitement.

Susan said while grinning, "You have a crush on her, don't you?"

"What? No, well she is cute, but never mind that. I want to test this out," he said while grabbing a calculator and then punching in numbers.

"And how do you plan to do this?" she questioned.

Jason marched over to one of the rings, "Expansion in the rear, contraction ahead of us. We will spin this one at 750,000 RPM, clockwise," he then pointed to a ring in the far distance, "And Then we'll spin that ring at the same speed, but *counter* clockwise."

"What about the one in the middle? This sounds a bit too easy," said Susan.

"It's a bit more complex than that, I've had to make several modifications. The center ring will do absolutely nothing. We'll use the extra power to get the front and back ones up to

speed,” Jason said in reply. He then turned to Susan, put his hands together as though he were begging and said, “Can we try it, please, please pretty please?”

“I don’t know,” she replied, “it sounds dangerous to me. These things weren’t designed to do that.”

Jason responded, “The first sign of trouble and I’ll throw the breaker. Come on Susan, you said yourself that our current travel time puts limits on us.”

“What happens if it does work, but something goes wrong and we’re unable to get back?” Susan questioned.

Jason thought about it a minute and answered, “We’ll um, I’ll ask Kara to follow us in one of their own ships. Worst case scenario is that we’ll have to evacuate and send the Challenger back on auto-pilot.”

Susan still pondering the idea said, “I don’t know about this Jason, still sounds risky. John would have our asses if we lost the Challenger.”

“I’m not talking about a big jump,” he said literally jumping into the air, “just a little one.”

Susan thought about it a minute and said, “Well, if it means this much to you. But the first sign of trouble and I’m going to throw the switch.”

“Fair enough,” Jason said before running back up the ladder. Susan just shook her head while turning into the opposite direction. She

shouted, “Get some sleep!” as she approached the exit.

Chapter twenty-seven

Challenger Vessel
Nibiru Orbit, Sol

Susan and John were in contact using the tachyon communication device located in the mess area, now to include a video link. This area was chosen to allow the crew to contact their loved ones back on Earth. This was the same prototype that Jason had built on board the Excalibur. He had packed it up to bring with him immediately after receiving word of the transfer.

"Sounds dangerous," said John.

Susan replied with, "He's fairly confident it'll work. I plan to throw the switch at the slightest sign of trouble. Not to mention an Angarian ship will be travelling with us in case something goes wrong. We could *really* use this technology."

John paused a moment and then said, "Have Jason run it by Kara as an added precaution. *If* there are any *major* risks, then she should be able to point them out."

Susan then grunted in agreement with his suggestion. "Am I detecting a sign of jealousy?" John queried.

Susan lightly blushed as she responded. "Of course not, Jason and I are work colleagues. I can't believe you would even say that." She then quickly changed the subject, "So how's Jessica?"

John answered, "She's coming around, I can only imagine how hard it has been for her."

Where are you two staying?"

"I bought a condo not far from the base. My sister Beth has been paying regular visits to keep her occupied while I'm at work. She starts back to school next week, she's very excited about that."

Susan commented, "Well I'm glad to hear things are going good back home. I hate this, but I need to go make sure Jason doesn't blow us to high heaven. Besides, there is a Marine behind me who looks anxious to call home."

"Don't want to upset a Marine. I'll let you get back to work." he replied.

"See you later, John."

Several hours later, Susan and Jason were in the command pit of the Challenger. Several people in white coats marched in and out around them.

"Oh Jason, did you run your idea by Kara as John had asked?"

Jason answered Susan as he tapped on some controls, "I sure did, I'm glad I did too."

"I bet you are," Susan said under her breath.

Jason continued, "She said it doesn't carry any major risks. But since she's not familiar with

our rings she's not sure whether or not it will work. She did say we have to travel outside of the Helios layer before attempting the experiment. We're just talking around a half hour of travel time from our current position."

"Did she say why we had to be in empty space?" Susan questioned.

Jason answered, "Not in any detail, she just mentioned an accident that occurred a while back."

"Very well, inform the Angarian vessel we are about to depart. I'll get the rings fired up," She said.

As the confirmation of zero mass was heard, Susan gave the order to fire the engines. The Challenger sped off to reach empty space after about a twenty-eight minute trip.

Upon arrival Jason said, "We're here."

Susan commented, "Well I guess its now or never, do your thing."

Jason began shouting out commands, "rings are spinning at six-hundred, seven-hundred..."

As ripples began to appear around the ship, Susan quickly turned to Jason out of concern, "Jason..."

Jason responded, "It's alright, Kara told me this would happen. It isn't really happening, it's just a visual distortion. Preparing to release the containment field, standby."

The Challenger then shot off with nothing more than a blue light trail that faded after less

than a second. The Angarian ship behind them merely vanished from site, without the same spectacular display. As the crew of the Challenger gazed at the view screen, all they could see was a series of flashing colors and distortions. Susan queried Jason on this, but he wasn't concerned. While the ship shook, Susan operated some nearby controls. A set of iron doors then encased the glass at the front of the ship.

"Beginning deceleration of the rings," Jason said while pulling back on a lever. After a few minutes he noted, "We've come to a complete stop."

Susan revealed the glass once again, noting that the view had returned to normal. The Angarian ship came in to sight a moment later. She turned to view the monitor behind her, where the sun looked like nothing more than a distant star. "Where we at?" she asked.

"Two billion miles from where we were if I'm reading this right," Jason answered.

Susan said, "You *got* to be kidding me. How fast were we going?"

"Nope, it's true. It's safe to say we broke the light barrier, or went around it anyway. Our equipment wasn't design to measure speed like this. Based on how far we've travelled and for how long, I'm estimating right around a million miles per second," said Jason.

Susan's eyes widened as she said, "That's incredible, can you get us back?"

“I hope so,” Jason replied.

Susan squinted her eyes at him and said,
“you’d better.”

Chapter twenty-eight

Challenger Vessel, Space

A young lady operating the communications console said aloud, "We're being contacted by other ship."

"Lets hear it," said Susan.

As the operator tapped a few keys on a keyboard, Kara's voice could be heard over the speakers. "We are still attempting to confirm this, we are picking up massive spatial distortions about six light years out."

"A fleet of ships? You can see that?" Jason questioned. Susan slowly rose out of her chair.

"Its still too faint to tell. Our sensor range is extended greatly when outside of the star system. Unfortunately, we can only see them as distortions from this distance. We are dropping an amplifier for continued monitoring," Kara explained.

Susan walked over to Jason's chair and placed her hands on his shoulders from behind him. "Jason, take us back *now*."

“I’m on it! Take a seat and get ready to rumble,” he said while simultaneously pressing buttons.

Upon returning to Nibiru about an hour later, Susan was already in mess area ready make use of the tachyon communicator. As with the conventional system, it had limitations when used while travelling at near light speed.

“The Angarians have confirmed it to be two large fleets, one is approaching us and the other larger one is headed towards you,” she said to John using the device. “Do you want us to head home?”

John responded, “Negative, we gave our word we’d help them out. Am I correct in assuming that they will reach you first?”

“Kara said that they wouldn’t want to risk FTL travel inside the system, anymore than the rest of us. So I would say, *probably* a few good hours earlier,” she replied.

Speaking quickly, John said, “Tell Harrison to stand his ground and assist the Nibiru ships. If your successful in thwarting their attack, you and all available ships can set a course home to lend us a hand. In the meantime, I’ll ready the fleet.”

“All right John, will do.”

“Oh and Susan?” John queried.

“Yes,” said Susan.

“Take care of yourself, and good luck.”

“You do the same, Cole out.”

After John removed his headset, he rushed to a desk that rested inside the Kennedy Space Center. He picked up the telephone and said into it, "Operator, get me Rikker."

The operator replied, "One moment, Mr. Stone."

Moments later, Rikker came on the line, "What can I do for you John?"

John quickly said to him, "We're going to have company. Meet me in the conference room, and bring the brass with you. Oh, and I need a favor..."

Not long after, a knock was heard at the door of John's condominium. Jessica rushed to the door and creaked it open. Then she saw two men wearing Air Force uniforms, both men had a set of wings pinned onto their coats. Beth immediately joined her at the door and asked, "Can I help you?"

The taller of the two men replied, "I'm Airmen Russell. Beth and Jessica Stone I presume?"

"Yes, that's us," she carefully answered with a shake in her voice.

"We have orders from John Stone to take you to a secure location. Please allow us to escort you to our vehicle."

She replied, "Of course, just let me grab a few things," while throwing her long black hair back over her shoulder.

The shorter of the two airmen said, "Please be prompt, we have a helicopter standing by for transport."

"Transport to where?" she asked as she looked down at Jessica briefly. She then quickly directed her green eyes back to the officer.

"The location will be revealed in route for security purposes. Please hurry, this *is* a time sensitive matter," repeated the tall man with his dark hair clipped high and tight.

Meanwhile on the Relinquent, a voice was heard inside of the command pit. "Sir, several ships are lifting off of the moon's surface. Should I expose weapons?"

Harrison replied, "Negative, I can't say that I blame them. Signal Tyran and inform him that I would like to speak with him. See if you can get Jason and Kara on the same channel."

After a few moments, the short officer dressed in his flight suit said, "Sorry for the delay, we are still working out bugs in interfacing our communication systems. I have them on speaker sir."

Tyran was the first to speak, "We only have eighty ships left over from the last engagement with the Imperium, seven of which were sent to Earth. Even with your help, we simply won't be able to produce enough firepower to destroy a fleet of that magnitude."

"Maybe you won't have to," Jason said through the speaker. "Kara and I have been go-

ing over the Grey shielding specifications that we obtained from the last battle. We found something that just *might* give us an advantage. I'll let her explain it in more detail."

Kara then entered into the group conversation and said, "The Grey seem to use electromagnetic refractive shielding. Basically this is a powerful magnetic field that protects the ship from matter *and* energy based weapons. This also helps prevent ships in close formation from running into each other by means of a repulsive force. What we are proposing is that we reverse the polarity of this magnetic field. We can do this by modifying our weapons to emit particles that will ionize the field with a positive charge. This *should* counter-act with their shields."

"How will this help us?" Harrison asked.

Jason went on to explain, "Well, they don't really know *we* are here, right? So we hide, say in the red planet's atmosphere. Once the shield polarity has been reverse, the metal on any missiles that we have will be attracted to them like magnets. We just have to make sure our ships are long gone before detonation due the buildup effect, at least that's what I think it was."

"Buildup effect?" Harrison questioned.

Jason continued, "When we took down the first control ship around Earth, the enemy managed to get their shields up sooner than we expected. The weapon was already lodged between the haul and the shielding by the time

they did this. For some reason, this created an even bigger bang than we thought it would, probably due to the sudden outburst of kinetic energy. Now multiply that times the number of ships we'll be attacking, and we should have quite an explosion."

"We have only one problem," Harrison said, "We only have twenty-seven nukes left. Also, have you informed the Angarians about possible radio active contamination to their space?"

"If the enemy stays in a tight formation like we've seen so far, that should be all we need if we spread them out right. If nothing else it will at least even the odds a bit. As far as contamination goes, they evidently have technology that can clean it up easy enough. After all these aren't World War II weapons. They emit little if any radiation inside of a space vacuum." Jason noted.

"Stop making me feel old," Harrison said, "how long will their shields be affected?"

"Three minutes, give or take," said Jason.

Harrison pondered it for a moment and then said, "What do you think Tyran, can you get your people out of harms way in time?"

"I am still uncertain how these *Nukes* of yours work. Under normal circumstances I would say the plan is too risky from the sound of their capabilities, but these are far from normal circumstances. I suppose its time for us to

use the *big kahunas* which seem to serve your people so well in the past," he answered.

"Big Kahunas?" Harrison queried.

"It's an inside joke sir," said Jason, "They wanted to know what type of weapon we used to counter the Grey, so I told them."

Tyran continued, "There are still many details to work out in order to conclude whether or not this plan is feasible. Kara, will join me on the P'Joran where we can run a simulation."

After the Angarians left the channel, Harrison addressed Jason directly. "Do you think her idea will work?"

"I have to admit it's a bit over my head, but it made sense once she put it in terms I could understand." Jason answered.

"Do you think this same tactic will work at home? I'm still not clear on all this technical lingo so keep it simple," Harrison asked.

Jason went on to answer Harrison's question, "Probably not I'm sorry to say. Once the Grey reaches the outer edge of the system, they have to drop their speed to a velocity that is below the speed of light. The fleet headed towards Earth will have to travel nearly to the center of the system, especially if they plan to come around the sun like we think they will do. Chances are that the battle here will be over regardless of how it turns out at least a few hours before the fight around Earth even begins. The Grey will probably adapt their shielding once they learn what

happens here, so I doubt John will have any luck using the same strategy.”

“Makes sense, where did you learn all this stuff from?”

“Television sir, lots of it,” Jason said jokingly.

“Smart ass,” Harrison replied just before throwing a switch that closed the channel.

Chapter twenty-nine

Florida, United States
Earth, Sol System

John sat at a large conference table located deep inside the Kennedy Space Center. Joining him were Rikker, General Cady and several other military officers, engineers and scientists. Though he'd done this several times in the past, it wasn't quite the same to him without his usual colleagues there to join him.

Rikker was speaking as people still were entering the room. "Our best guess is that they will attempt to approach from behind the sun. If that *is* the case, then it might be best if we engaged the enemy near the planet Venus. We first thought Mercury, to keep them as far away from Earth as possible. But the fleet's hauls were never tested to withstand the extreme temperatures that exist that close to the sun. The problem is that we won't know the direction of their approach for certain until they are approximately ninety minutes from Earth."

"That's cutting it a bit close, isn't it?" John said.

“It is indeed,” said Ed, “this is why we won’t be dispatching our fleet from Earth’s orbit until the last possible minute.”

“What exactly are we looking at?” asked General Steven Cady, as the overhead lighting reflected off his bald head, “please don’t tell me you plan to leave Earth defenseless.”

“The Angarians *and* NASA have confirmed that we are going to be dealing with about one hundred-twenty Grey battleships, some of the largest we’ve ever seen,” John said, “That number could increase by as much as one hundred if our forces on the outer rim should fail in their assault.”

Cady stood up and raised his voice, “One hundred-twenty ships? We have less than 40 ships to provide a counter strike with, let alone to defend the planet!”

“Don’t forget the seven ships provided by our allies, very advanced ships at that. I thought that was rather nice of them if you consider they are facing the same threat we are,” Rikker commented.

The General replied, “Yeah well they owe us, it is the least they can do. Not to mention some of our best battle ships are out there right now, when they should be here defending *our* planet!”

Growing tired of repeating himself, John chose to do what he’s quite grown accustomed to doing in times such as these. “Look, we have faced great odds before, may I remind you that

last time we faced these types of odds we didn't have a fleet at all, just some conventional aircraft jury-rigged to work in space. Do you think that I didn't have any doubts in my mind when I boarded an experimental aircraft that might not have even lifted off the ground? Sure, I had more than enough doubts. I didn't think that I would be coming back that day. But look at what was at stake, it is the exact same thing that is at stake right now. We just might lose our asses this time around, but if we do at least we will go out fighting. We got something they don't have though, we have the will to survive, something I think our enemy not only lacks, but also underestimates. Normally we have a battle plan, the only plan we have this time is to throw everything we have at them, which is far more than we had a few years ago. Cady, we will not be leaving our planet defenseless. We'll be leaving two battle cruisers and a carrier in orbit. In addition, rest assured that we could have more support available here in a matter of minutes if needed. If at all possible though, that will not be necessary, we plan to stop the enemy from reaching earth in the first place. Thanks to the hard work of those sitting at this table and to the folks that work under them, we could not be more ready than we are now. I have been informed that all of our ships have been equipped with the new energy shielding that was pro-

vided by our alien friends, that's right, our *friends*. So on that note, are any other questions?"

The room was quiet as John made eye contact with each person at the table, one after another. Then he continued, "Well, if that will be all, I trust those under each of your command are in need of your experience and your *support*, and *not* your damned criticism. Any new information will be made available to you as it comes in. Shuttles and helicopters are standing by to carry you to your assigned vessels. Those of you whose ships are on *this* base will have to either walk or drive. Good luck to each of you, and let's keep those spirits up. When it comes down to it, that may be all we have going for us."

As the room emptied, John returned to his office and approached his desk. After a few mouse clicks, he attempted to connect to a terminal located in his old quarters at Graviton Heavy Industries. He saw his sister Beth, followed by his daughter shortly enter into the picture.

"Are you guys alright?" he asked while looking into his web cam.

Beth replied, "We're fine, though I have to admit we were a bit shaken at first."

"Sorry about that, but it was the only way to put my mind at ease."

"What's happening Daddy?" asked Jessica as she wiggled her way up front towards the camera.

"I have to go to space," he said. "To make sure you're alright, I had asked those men to move you to the safest place I know of."

Jessica asked, "How safe is it?"

He replied, "It's the safest place on the planet, I know because it kept me safe lots of times."

"You think you might find Mommy out there?" she questioned.

John shed a slight tear and answered, "If she's out there, I'll find her. No matter what happens though, I want you to know that you're in good hands. I love you."

Jessica said, "I love you too, will you call us?"

"I will call you every single day I promise, but I have to go now."

"When will you be back?" she asked.

"I'm not sure, but I *will* be back," he said putting himself closer to the web cam.

Jessica smiled while Beth told him, "You be careful out there little brother, alright?"

John replied, "No matter what happens, I'll be at peace just knowing she's alright. Take good care of her, will you?"

"That I'll make sure of. *You* just focus on keeping the promise you just made to this little girl," said Beth.

"Thinking about you guys is what keeps me alive. Listen, I have to go," he said briefly.

"Take care of yourself John, the world appreciates everything you're doing," she said.

“I’ll do my best, take care of my little girl, okay?” he repeated.

She answered, “You know I will, now go put an end to all this madness once and for all.”

“That’s the plan,” he said, “I’ll keep you posted. Bye-bye for now.”

Upon closing the link, John put his head down and wiped away some tears. Then he stood up tall as though he was ready to take on the world. He exited the room and headed towards the launch pad, driving the sports utility vehicle that had been left to him by his father.

Chapter thirty

“Commander, enemy ships on radar, they’re moving towards the moon,” said Seth aboard the Relinquent.

“Hold it steady,” said Harrison.

He pressed a button on the arm of his chair, “Cole, are you seeing this?” the Commander asked.

Susan, who was on the Challenger answered, “We are Commander, the Angarian fleet is standing by.”

As the tightly packed Imperium fleet approached a row of Angarian ships, Tyran gave an order. “Fire disruption wave.”

Each of the ships began firing a purple like beam, unlike that of what a laser or particle beam might look like. Instead, each ray of light widened as it left the tip of it’s designated cannon.

“My Lord, we appear to be taking no damage from the enemy’s weapons,” said the shipmaster on board the Imperium flagship.

The Overlord replied, “This race is even weaker than I expected. Zyron is a fool for losing such a primitive world.”

Another Grey onboard the ship spoke out, "They have seized firing and are now in retreat."

"Now!" Jason yelled from his console on board the Challenger.

Harrison then sent an order to the fleet, "Deploy warheads."

An evil grin manifested on the Overlord's face on board the Imperium flag ship, "Have the fleet target the ships in retreat and..."

"My Lord, we have objects approaching from the eight o'clock position.."

"What!" he yelled in response.

Over two-dozen missiles approached and then magnetically locked onto to the haul of several Grey battle cruisers. As they detonated simultaneously, the ships began to disintegrate instantly into a white flash of light. Other ships in the vicinity were either destroyed or sent adrift from the force of the blast. A transmission was then received on each of the Earth vessels, "This is Lataruf from the Angarian cruiser Standar. All but seven Imperium vessels have been disabled or destroyed. The remaining ships have regained formation and are headed towards you."

After hearing the transmission, Harrison could only cry out in laughter as he said, "Like flies to a pile of shit!"

Meanwhile Jason yelled out from his console on board the Challenger, "We have an active

warhead jammed inside a launch tube, I can't break it loose!"

Susan rushed to the communications panel, "Attention to the fleet, distance yourselves from the Challenger, get out of here, we're going to blow." She then threw another switch and said, "Attention all sections, abandon ship, I repeat abandon ship!"

Several pods began ejecting from several openings around the ship. Each fired thrusters immediately after clearing the ship.

Susan rushed to a nearby console and began pressing buttons. "What are you doing, we've got to go," cried Jason.

"If we can't lose it we'll use it," she said while pushing forward on a lever.

Jason yelled, "All right now let's go!"

When they arrived at the lifeboat, Jason threw her in while he operated the control panel attached to the outside wall.

Susan yelled out to him, "Jason hurry, It'll eject once you close the door, get your ass in here!"

"We are too close to detonation for the clamps to release in time. We'll never escape the blast unless the thrusters...there we go, hold on tight," he said as he rushed into the pod and closed the large door behind him.

The pod fired thrusters instantly, literally tearing a hole in the hull where the docking clamps were once attached to the ship. The Chal-

lenger itself was on a course for the remaining Imperium fleet where it then collided with the lead ship. After drilling a hole into its side of it, only a white nuclear flash could be seen from the space around them. All that remained afterwards, was a single Imperium battle cruiser that appeared crippled, but still operational.

“Load four ninety-nine missiles and target that ship,” said Harrison from the command pit of the Relinquent.

Four streaks of light lit up the area as the Missiles launched and instantly impacted the remaining enemy ship. Several explosions triggered as the ship finally broke into three parts, and then exploded. Lifeboats were thrown in all directions from the kinetic blast of the resulting shockwave.

Only silence was heard inside the command pit of the Relinquent. It sailed through the remaining cloud of debris on a course to meet up with the Angarian fleet.

“Tyran, we have survivors out there. Care to give us a hand?” said Harrison over radio.

Tyran responded, “We’ve already dispatched a ship to scan the area. We are sorry for your losses. I have never before witnessed such power from a single weapon. I did not think that we would prevail.”

“Big Kahunas have a way of beating the odds in the most desperate of situations,” Harrison replied, “remember that.”

Chapter thirty-one

As the fleet along with over four-dozen Angarian ships set a course for Earth, the Relinquent and remaining ships stayed behind to rescue survivors from the Challenger explosion.

"Any word from Jason and Susan yet?"

Seth answered, "Not yet, they were the last to eject, I hope they got away in time."

Harrison replied, "I know Jason is a friend of yours, keep trying." He put his head down and let loose a sigh.

"Aye sir," Seth responded. He gazed into space and then looked back to his console.

"Almost got it," Jason said as he strained to remove a piece of steel that had entrapped Susan's legs. As it gave way, he fell back and hit his head on a crate of supplies.

"You all right?" Susan asked.

Jason rested himself on the floor beside her and held his head, "I'll be fine. What about you?"

She replied, "My legs are a bit cramped from the weight of that object, but I think I'm okay. I wonder how many got off the ship before it blew."

"I think that we were the last to go, not sure how many made it out of blast range though."

"That was a pretty risky thing you did back there, it could have torn the pod apart."

Still holding his head, Jason responded, "If I hadn't of then we wouldn't be having this conversation right now, now would we? Besides, I wouldn't have had to engage the thrusters prematurely if you would've left when I told you to."

Susan replied in a calm voice, "I guess we're both as hard headed as the next person. I just hope it was worth it. The only thing that I can see out this little window is empty space. I *do* have to admit though, I never realized just how beautiful space was until now...despite our situation of course."

As though Jason were thinking out loud, he commented, "I'm sure the remaining Grey ships were no match for the fleet, assuming that the Angarians joined in the battle, which I'm sure they did."

Susan asked, "You have quite a fondness for those people, don't you?"

"I have a certain respect for their level of technology and willingness to share it with us if that's what you mean," he answered.

Susan commented, "Not quite, there seems to be a particular one which you seem quite connected to."

"Kara," Jason said with rolling eyes, "Are you saying I have a thing for her?"

"Well there wouldn't be anything wrong with it, she's quite attractive you know. According to the Doctor, our species are nearly identical. Humans and Angarians may even be able to, you know."

Jason stated, "We're stranded in an escape pod, somewhere in deep space with no clue of what is going on around us, and you're asking me if I have a crush on an alien?"

"Sorry, I didn't mean to get personal."

Then Jason sighed and quietly said, "...she reminds me of somebody I used to know, that's all."

"Someone that was special?" she asked.

"Sort of, yeah. No offense, but can we talk about something else?"

"All right," she said.

A few moments had come to pass before Susan stated, "You know, I hate to sound like *you* for a change, but considering we may not get out of here alive..."

"We are going to be fine," said Jason, interrupting her sentence.

She continued, "I'm just saying that *if* we don't make it, I want you to know that I wouldn't pick on you so much if I didn't care."

“Yeah, I know, sometimes I do things that I know will aggravate you on purpose,” he replied.

“What about John, do you think he’ll ever find his wife?”

“I don’t know,” Jason answered, “sometimes I think he just lets on like he might for Jessica’s sake.”

“She’s a great kid and John’s a different person since he found her. I hope I have a little girl just like her some day, what about you?” she asked.

“Kids? I’m not sure,” he said as he got up and fiddled with a control box.

“What’s not to be sure of?”

“Well, our world’s future is unknown right now. I’m not sure if I’d want to bring a new life into the world the way it is now. For that matter, there may not even *be* a planet left if and when we get back there.”

Susan responded, “I’m sure things will be okay, John’s quite persistent in his ways.”

“He has every right to be considering what he’s been through,” he said. He then closed the panel he was working in and stated, “I had to reduce power to the environmental control system in order to boost the transponder signal. It’s going to get a bit cold in here but there *should* be some blankets in the crate.”

Jason opened the crate to pull out some food, water and then finally a single blanket. “I sup-

pose these life boats are intended for a single passenger,” he said as he handed Susan the blanket.

A few minutes later, Susan was drawn to look at Jason after catching sight of his breath. He sat next to her shaking with his arms crossed over his legs.

She lifted the blanket cover and said, “You know despite what you might have heard, I don’t bite.”

He thought about it a moment and then justified the act in saying, “Well the heat our bodies produce would keep us a lot warmer.”

He got under the blanket with his back to Susan. Afterwards he said, “Don’t you dare tell anybody about this.”

Upon receiving no response to his comment, he turned his head to see that she was fast asleep. After a few more minutes, Jason found himself nodding off as well.

No more than thirty minutes later, Seth made an observation and addressed Harrison. “Sir, I think I’ve found something. It looks like a command pod,” he said with some excitement in his voice.

Harrison said, “Good news, lets hope we’re not too late. Bring it on board, and then come with me to the shuttle bay.”

Moments later, Jason and Susan were awakened by a jolt of force followed by an intense bright light. The pod’s hatch began to crack open

only for them to see Harrison and Seth looking directly at them, both with a strange look on their faces. Jason immediately jumped up from under the cover and said, “Okay, this is *not* what it looks like,” as Susan began to smile.

“So this is what happens when the cat’s away,” said Harrison jokingly, “You love birds have been rescued, but if you like I can close this hatch here and give you a few more minutes. Don’t worry, your secret is safe with us, isn’t that right Seth?”

Seth placed his hand around his mouth and said, “Yup, my lips are sealed sir.”

Jason grabbed the blanket off Susan and threw it to the floor while she continued to smile at the embarrassed look on his face while he exited the lifeboat. Harrison reached for Susan’s hand to help her up and out of the pod.

“We were beginning to worry about you two considering your pod was the last to be recovered,” he said.

“How many made it off the ship before it exploded?” Susan asked.

The commander replied, “Aside from a few scrapes and scratches, I believe we got everyone. I’d have to see the ship’s manifest to be certain. There were a few burns, concussions and that sort of thing. But those Angarian folks were quite a wiz when it came down to fixing them up and sending them on home.”

“That’s great news, and the Challenger?” she asked.

He said, “You shoved that ship right down their throats little lady. I was a bit disappointed, since there was just one left for me to deal with by the time you got through with them. I was hoping for a bigger part in the act. Listen, Why don’t you folks go get cleaned up. We’re on our way to Earth you know and I’m sure you’ll want to look your best when we begin blackening the eyes of those little green men.”

While walking away from the pod, Jason said sarcastically under his breath, “Their eyes are already black, sir.”

Seth, who over heard the comment, just grabbed Jason’s shoulder and said, “Good to have you back man.”

Chapter thirty-two

"Commander, a fleet of Angarian ships with a few of our own have just arrived," said Airmen Brigs while monitoring communications.

John said, "Good, I guess they were successful then. Put me through to Harrison."

"Sorry sir, we are receiving reports that the Relinquent had to behind to search of survivors."

"Survivors?" John asked out of concern.

Brigs continued, "Yes sir, it appears that the Challenger was destroyed during a sacrificial run."

John recalled that to be the last ship Susan and Jason were aboard, "Were any survivors found?"

"Uncertain, they had just begun to search as the other ships left orbit," the Airmen replied.

John looked at the empty seat that Jason once occupied on the Excalibur. He feared the loss of his friends on board the Challenger. Whether or not they had survived, he knew that they would have expected him to carry on his mission. John turned to Airmen brigs once again and said, "Put me through to the Carolina."

John heard a message coming over the radio, "This is Rikker on board the Carolina, what can I do for you John?"

John questioned, "What's the status of the enemy fleet?"

"It looks like their doing exactly what the Angarians thought they'd do. I think it's about that time."

"Agreed." John turned to the navigations console, there sat a man wearing a black flight suit. He said to him, "Fire up the VMP and take us to projected intercept point one."

As the Excalibur sped off towards the planet Venus, the rest of the fleet, including the Angarian ships, followed.

A few minutes after they arrived at the destination, a short man sitting at what appeared to be a radar station yelled out, "We're picking up enemy ships sir, and their slowing down."

"I'll take it that they've seen us," John replied. "Activate shielding and expose all weapon ports. Begin firing everything we've got the moment they're in range."

Both the Earth forces and the Angarians held formation as they traced the Imperium's movements through the solar system. Finally, a voice was heard inside command pit, "We're in range, targeting the closest ship."

"Lay it to their asses," John said over the radio.

Simultaneously, multiple particle beams and missiles began to impact the Imperium cluster of ships. Three Angarian ships pulled ahead, each firing a single burst of Purplish light at the targets, disabling two of them.

“What type of weapon is that?” John said while wearing his headset.

The commander of the Atlantis responded, “It’s their most powerful weapon, but they can only fire one shot before it has to recharge.”

“Lord Zyron, we are taking weapons fire, two of our vessels have been disabled,” said a voice aboard the Incursive.

Zyron replied, “Do they honestly think they stand a chance against us. No more games, lets show these pathetic life forms what *real* power is.”

It then seemed as though every Imperium ship began to fire green plasma bolts at the opposing vessels.

“Sir, our shields are taking a beating,” said Airmen Brigs. This comment went ignored while John watched the Endeavor move out of control and collide with one of the Angarian vessels.

Among the chatter that was going on over the airwaves, John was able to isolate a single voice. “This is Kara aboard the Devul, we are going to attempt the magnetic shield distortion wave.”

A few moments later he heard the same voice state, "The wave was ineffective. It seems they have adapted their shielding."

"Do they really think I'm that stupid," said Zyron aloud as he watched the Devul closely on his screen. "Target the Angarian Vessel, no need for prisoners."

The Imperium flagship fired a large burst of energy at the target specified by Zyron. The Devul began to explode as countless shuttles departed from within it. John put his head down as he watched the explosion from afar. He then pointed to the Incursive on the viewer and said, "Throw everything we got at that ship."

All particle cannons attached to the haul of the Excalibur then lit up, followed by the release of at least a dozen X-99 missiles. The Incursive then fell back to hide behind two other Imperium ships. The Excalibur no longer had a clear line of site with the ship that they were firing on. The two battle cruisers, now acting as guardians, suddenly sent weapons fire hurling toward the Excalibur. The result triggered several small explosions over the haul of John's ship.

It then appeared as though the Relinquent had appeared out of nowhere and rammed into one of the ships that John was taking fire from. The force of the impact completely destroyed the target, and disabled two nearby Imperium battleships. John rose up out of his chair, "What the

Hell," he said while throwing his fists onto a console to his right.

Brigs then yelled out, "Sir, we have several more ships closing in from behind us. I also just received word that we've lost the New Jersey."

John cried out, "We're running out of options, prepare for a nuclear weapons launch."

Rikker then came over the radio, "John, we'll be sure to be caught in the explosion."

"It's us or Earth, we have no...standby," said John as he gazed at the screen in front of him. "The ships that just arrived are firing on their own fleet."

Rikker took notice and said, "Your right, what the hell is going on here!"

"I have no idea, but let's fall back and regroup. We may not get another chance like this."

The Human and Angarian ships quickly backed off as they watched Aturos's fleet engage the attacking Imperium vessels. After reaching a safe distance, the fleet defending Earth opened their bays retrieve lifeboats and Angarian shuttles alike. A voice yelled over the radio on the Carolina, "We don't have room for all these!"

Rikker responded, "Get the craft, get the crew off and then throw it back into space to make room for the next."

"Sir, we've retrieved a shuttle from the Relinquent, Susan Cole and Jason Jones are among the passengers," said Brigs.

John forced a small grin and said, "Attend to any medical needs and escort those two up here."

Moments later, Jason, Susan and Seth arrived at the command pit. Jason said to John right after entering, "Did you miss us?" while Susan rushed to John and gave him a hug,

John raised his head while looking Susan's eyes and said, "Harrison?"

Susan shook her head, "Sorry John, he forced us and the rest of a command pit into a lifeboat after ordering an evacuation. When we asked him what his plan was, he just said that I gave him an idea and *a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do*.

"Damn it, he was a good man who probably saved the life of everybody on this ship. He won't be forgotten," said John as he put his arms around Susan.

Jason took seat at his vacant console and looked to notice that the enemy ships were fighting amongst themselves, "What's happening here?"

John replied, "We have no idea, a fleet arrived out of nowhere and then they began shooting at each other. It won't hold for long, it looks like the new arrivals are being hit hard. In the meantime we're trying to save as many survivors as we can."

A voice came over the radio, "Commander Stone, there is an Angarian women who just

came aboard, she's requesting permission to join you in the command pit."

"Escort her in," said John.

A few minutes later John said, "Kara, I thought for sure you were killed."

"I was able to make it onto one of our escape vessels," she said.

Jason immediately turned to her and said, "It's nice to see you again."

While Susan put on her headset, she sarcastically but quietly commented, "Great, its one big happy reunion."

John overheard her discreetly said, "Susan you worry too much. I think it's time we head back to work and finish what we started."

Chapter thirty-three

As the fleet began to re-enter the battle zone, an Imperium shuttle approached the Excalibur.

"It's not firing, what do you think it wants?" queried Susan.

John replied, "I don't know, but I sure as hell would like to find out. Jason, can you tell whether or not it has any destructive material on board?"

"Negative," Jason answered, "it's just the basic workings of a space craft best I can tell. Infrared tells me there is just one life form aboard, too cold to be a humanoid."

John thought about it a moment and then made a decision. "Have a team of Marines report to the shuttle bay. Bring it in, have the life form put into detention and then eject the craft. If you see any sign of a threat, then blow it up."

As John made way to the detention unit, he was halted by Kara, who handed him a pendant similar to the one that was still around his neck. "You may need this," she said as he took it in his right hand.

After arriving at the unit where the Grey was being held, John removed the safety latch from the pistol on his side. He then took notice of a Grey who stood about five-foot-five. The being spoke to John in a language that was clearly alien to him. John handed him the pendant through the black iron bars.

“Who are you and what do you want?” John said in a firm tone.

The being responded, “I am Aturos, and I need your help.”

“Why would we want to help you?” John asked.

“The recent attack against your worlds was not the decision of our leaders. We are currently involved in a conflict with one another.”

John questioned, “So what brings you here? Your lucky we didn’t shoot you on site.”

“A single Overlord has brought this madness upon you. He must be stopped or both our races will face the consequences,” Aturos explained.

They were then interrupted by a call to John’s portable radio, “What is it Susan?”

She replied, “In the midst of the battle, the largest ship has broken away. It appears to be on a course for Earth.”

John spoke into the handheld radio, “Set a course to follow and throw everything we have at it.”

"That is him, he must be stopped, he has enough firepower on that ship to kill everything on your planet," said Aturos.

"Can you get me on that ship?" John asked.

Aturos responded, "I believe so, but for what purpose?"

"To destroy it, what do you think? If you want me to help you then you have to *earn* my trust by helping me," John replied.

John then spoke into his radio once again, "Susan, have them arm a nuke with a timed detonation. Place it on a shuttle, I'm going on a field trip. Have a few Marines meet me down there."

Susan said, "John, I can't let you do this."

"She's right, I'm supposed to be the one doing all the stupid things," said Jason.

"I've made up my mind," said John, "do not let that ship approach Earth, even if it means destroying it with me on board."

"But you need to think about Jessica," Susan cried.

John replied, "I am thinking about her, and if I don't make it then I'm counting on you to keep her safe from now on."

It took a few moments for Susan to respond but she finally said, "Your shuttle will be ready by the time you get there, but please be careful."

John looked at the Marine that was standing guard and motioned him to open the door to the

cell. Two other marines held a gun to Aturos's head as they approached the shuttle bay.

Kara looked at Susan in the command pit and said, "He is a brave man, he'll be remembered."

"He isn't dead yet sister," she replied. Meanwhile the Excalibur began to close in on Zyron's ship.

Three Dark Angels laid down cover fire to make way for the shuttle departing from the ship. Aturos took notice of a hole in the side Zyron's ship, which recently created by an X-99 missile.

"The shield emitters have been damaged in that area, we can enter there," he said as he pointed at the view port.

John questioned, "How are we supposed to breathe once we get in there?"

Aturos replied, "When damage like this occurs on one of our ships, a force field activates to contain the atmosphere. But I believe it will be weak enough for us to pass through."

"Jason, did you hear that?" John said while the Excalibur monitored all communications aboard the shuttle.

Jason replied, "Affirmative, the only shield I'm detecting in that area is over the point of entry itself. The shuttle should be able to pass through it easy enough."

John then took a control stick and pushed forward on it, moving it slightly to the left or

right as needed. Braking thrusters fired as the shuttle entered the opening. It slowly began to set down on the floor of the Incursive. The exit ramp opened, where Aturos lead the way while every Marine continued to have a weapon fixed onto him. John fell in behind them rolling the warhead down the ramp on a dolly containing four wheels. He reached for the remote detonator that was attached to his belt.

Chapter thirty-four

The Excalibur remained hot on the trail of the Incursive. Against orders, the vessel now under Susan's command only targeted Engines and weapons in an attempt to disable the ship without putting John in any serious danger.

"Susan, the Newport news battle cruiser is on approach, carrier Prometheus is launching fighters," said Jason.

Susan replied, "Inform them that we merely want to disable the ship and not destroy it if possible."

"Too late," Jason responded, "they just opened fire."

Seth jumped up and said, "They're the only vessels protecting the planet, I can't see them taking any chances."

"He's right Susan," said Jason, "They have orders to defend the planet at all costs."

Aboard the Incursive, John was in the process of arming a nuclear warhead when suddenly the entire ship rocked hard. The motion knocked him, his accomplices and the warhead to the ground. He was the first to come around when he noticed that the Marines were all lying on the

deck, knocked unconscious by flying debris. He looked to see Aturos standing up, which provoked him to reach for his side arm. John quickly looked at the warhead and then looked back at Aturos and said, "Are you still helping?"

Aturos answered, "I only want to complete this mission, after that I could care less about you or your people."

"At least your honest," John replied, "our weapon has been damaged. So we need another way to stop this ship."

"Then we need to make a path to the bridge, where we can kill Zyron or order the ship to self terminate. Either method will be effective."

John checked the life signs of the marines and then nudged his pistol into Aturos's side. "Help me get the men aboard the shuttle or you die right here," he said.

After the Marines were on board the shuttle, John set the autopilot and then rushed off before the door sealed shut. After the craft lifted off on autopilot, John said to Aturos, "Now take me to where we need to be."

After Jason saw the shuttle on approach, he stated, "Neither John or the alien is on that shuttle. However, I am picking up human heat signatures."

While John and Aturos discreetly made their way to the bridge, the shipmaster on the Incur-sive acquired the attention of Zyron. "Lord Zyron, we are taking heavy damage from the three

vessels in orbit around the planet below. Our engines will fail if this continues.”

Zyron yelled, “Take us back to the fleet.”

Susan who immediately noticed a change in the ship’s course said, “John’s still on that vessel, stay with it.”

Minutes later, the Incursive entered a position inside a cluster of Imperium Battle ships. The Excalibur was forced to come to a halt after noticing preparations for a nuclear strike against the cluster of ships. Zyron also recognised the intentions of the fleet defending Earth. He rushed to a control panel where he engaged an FTL jump from his current position. A massive distortion wave was suddenly created, disabling several ships around it. The Earth and Angarian vessels were also forced to fall back even further. Jason stood up and rushed towards the exit of the command pit. Before exiting he yelled, “Find out where that ship went!”

The remaining Imperium ships began to retreat at near light speeds, while the Earth ships stood down their nuclear attack. Some vessels remained stationary while at least half appeared to have set a course for Earth.

On the Incursive, Zyron’s move had knocked out or killed many of the crewmen on board. John and Aturos were among those that were knocked unconscious for a short while.

While John lay on the floor of the Incursive, he had a vision of his wife, surrounded by a

bright light saying, "It's not your time. Now go and save our daughter."

The vision then blurred into a view of the ceiling just above him. John shook his head in the realization that it just was a dream. He stood up to see Aturos lying on the ground not far from him. John approached Aturos and nudged him with his gun. As Aturos woke up, John said to him, "I need you to tell me what just happened."

The Grey slowly rose up and made his way to a nearby control panel. A moment later he said, "We are on approach to the Alpha-Draconis system, it is *imperative* that we stop him *now*."

John said, "Lead the way," in reply to Aturos's statement.

In route to the Bridge, John noticed another slight jolt. He asked Aturos, "What was that?"

Still facing forward, the Grey replied, "The ship has reduced speed. Come, we don't have much time."

They finally made their way to the bridge where they discovered it to be completely empty. Aturos rushed himself to a lit control panel and waved his right hand. He then said in his own language, "Central, what is our location?"

The computer replied, "We are approaching the second planet of Alpha-Draconis."

John looked quickly to the pendant around his neck once he realized it was unable to translate the computer's words.

"What is it saying?" John asked.

Instead of answering John's question, Aturos said, "I have instructed the ship to terminate."

"And what about us?" he said.

"This ship, Zyron and our selves will be destroyed," he replied.

John raised the gun said, "Bad idea, I know this ship has a launch bay, take me there."

As the two very different life forms approach the launch bay, Zyron was seen fiddling with some controls. He then ran towards a shuttle upon taking notice of John and Aturos. John asked Aturos, "Is that him?"

He said, "It is, we must not let him escape to the planet's surface."

Unsure of Aturos's determination to stop Zyron he said, "Get us one of those shuttles ready, I'll go after ugly."

John darted after Zyron as Aturos ran towards one of the nearby shuttles. John fired several rounds from his pistol while taking cover from return fire being sent from a device attached to Zyron's wrist. John then noticed a walkway that was built over the path in which his rival was headed. As Central kept chanting what seemed to be a countdown, John approached the overhead walkway and then leaped over top of Zyron which threw both of

them to the ground. John began slamming the weapon attached to Zyron's wrist repeatedly to the ground with his right hand. At the same time, he used his other arm to hold Zyron down by his throat. John then began throwing punches at a wound created by his pistol. Zyron revealed his pointed teeth and stroked his head forward several times as though he were attempting to bite him. John reached for his pistol that had been thrown just out of reach in the fight. While John reached for his side arm, Zyron literally took a bite out of John's right side, resulting in a gush of blood. Zyron then made a crawling run for the shuttle. He attempted to use the weapon attached to his wrist, but it failed to fire. Aturos, who took notice of John lying on the floor in a pool of blood, began to run towards him. John came around at the sight of Aturos dragging him aboard the shuttle that had been prepped for launch. While in pain John said to him, "You could have just left me back there to die."

Aturos replied, "How will that help my mission? I may still need your help."

The shuttle launched immediately after the door sealed itself shut. Moments later, the Incur-sive began to implode.

"There he is!" cried John as he pointed out the window of the shuttle. "Does this thing have any weapons?"

Aturos waved his hand over a control panel. A marker then displayed on the screen over Zyron's shuttle. Once it began flashing from yellow to green, Aturos made another wave that caused the shuttle fire a single shot at the fleeing spacecraft. The aft portion of Zyron's shuttle began to smoke as it started to go down into a spiral towards the surface of the dark red planet.

The spacecraft that John and Aturos was on, suddenly pulled up in an attempt to escape the planet's gravity. Once it reached safety away from the planet, John said, "I can't believe he bit me! I hope your species doesn't carry rabies."

Aturos replied, "It is a defensive instinct among my race."

The Grey reached into an opening and pulled out a sphere shaped item. He waved it over John's wound for a few seconds.

"Well the bleeding stopped but it still hurts like hell," John said.

Aturos replied, "Be grateful, this wasn't designed for your species."

"So can this thing take us home?" John asked, referring to the shuttle.

Aturos replied, "I'm afraid not. Once the natives of this system find us here, we'll be facing the same fate we would have faced if we had remained on the Incursive."

"Well, that sucks. I guess we should try to get as far away as we can then," he said while still holding his wounded side.

“What purposes will that serve? This vessel is not equipped to support us for long.”

John said to him, “You know, it’s no wonder we managed to do damage to you guys with so little to work with. You give up way too easy.”

“We do as we were each destined to do and no more,” he replied while continuing to pilot the shuttle.

Chapter thirty-five

Alpha-Draconis System

While the shuttle drifted in space, John wanted to get some answers before he died. He asked Aturos, "So why did you attempt to invade us?"

Aturos replied, "I did not, I voted against an invasion of your."

"But why?" he asked.

"For centuries we were destined for a specific purpose. Some like myself were able to overcome that programming, while those like Zyron were incapable of doing so."

John asked another question. "We were told our world was off limits, yet your *people* decided to attack anyway."

"It is very much like religion on your world. A foundation is formed, but over time belief's spread into several different directions," he answered.

"So why did you vote against attacking our world?"

Aturos replied, "I do not believe it was among our purpose to do so."

“Yet this Zyron felt otherwise,” John continued.

“It wasn’t his fault entirely. When a specific point came in our existence, his very nature was that of to disrupt our success,” he said.

“But why was he programmed to do this?”

Aturos stated, “It was the will of our makers, to rule and then seize to be.”

“So what have your makers been doing in all this time,” said John.

“Planning,” he said.

“Planning for what?”

Aturos replied to John’s last question with one word, “Domination.”

“I’m having a problem understanding,” John commented.

Aturos responded, “In your own species, do you not make sacrifices to protect your offspring?”

At that moment, John began to think about both his father and his daughter, “I suppose most of us do, yeah.”

“It’s not much different,” said Aturos, “since the beginning of time, instinct has varied from species to species, but at the same time it is all in the same. I have to query, did your race attack our home world?”

John answered, “We don’t even know where your home world is. Our actions have been nothing but self defense.”

“But it was one of *your* weapons, I have yet to have concluded an explanation for this,” said Aturos.

Aturos thought a moment and then asked, “But the Angarians, they aided you against us, did they not?”

“No, in fact, we liberated them by accident.”

“It appears there have been errors on both sides,” said Aturos, “you are in fact a unique species. Technologically limited, yet superior in tactics, perhaps that is why our scriptures wish you to remain isolated.”

“Because of our will to survive?” John asked.

“No,” Aturos replied, “because you are so much like *them*.”

“And who are *they*?”

“The Draconians, those who made us and those who claim everything around us.”

The in depth conversation was then interrupted by a beeping sound being heard from the shuttle’s console.

“What is it?” John asked.

They Grey replied, “It’s a nearby ship, most likely that of the Draconians. Our species are forbidden from this territory. It would appear that your quest to survive has been acted on in vein.”

“Are you absolutely sure,” John replied, “Can you get us a better look?”

Though the image was still quite faint through the view port, it’s shaped looked oddly

familiar to John. He picked up his radio and said into it, "This is John Stone, anybody out there?"

Aturos commented, "We are too far away, you species could never have made the journey. It would seem that your hope for a solution does not always favor survival among your race."

"Does this thing have any lights on the outside?"

Not long after asking, the lights around the Grey shuttle begin to flash an S.O.S. pattern as instructed. John heard nothing but static on his radio for several minutes. Suddenly a faint voice was detected, "This is Susan Cole aboard the battle ship Excalibur. We have taken notice of your signal, please authenticate your transmission."

John said with some excitement in his voice, "Still think it's only false hopes Aturos?"

The Grey was speechless while John said into his radio, "Jason's ability to demonstrate what an egghead he is never ceases to amaze me."

John then said to Aturos, "It would seem that your ease in giving up deprives your race of the solution it needs to survive. Lay in a course for that ship."

"Perhaps," said Aturos, "seems we will soon see."

Chapter thirty-six

John entered the command pit of the Excalibur. Still holding his side, limped towards Jason and said, "I thought you said it couldn't be done?"

In response, Jason first said, "What?" but then after a few seconds he said, "Oh, FTL. Well, I was wrong. Kara figured out where you were, I just got us there."

"What *was* that Jason? Did you say you were wrong?"

Jason got a bit irritated and said, "Yes I was wrong, you going to alert the press or shall I?"

John gave him a pat on the back and said, "Well you know what my friend, I'm glad you were wrong. Think of it like this, you've accomplished in a short time what most scientists have deemed impossible for decades."

A medic then seated John in his chair and began to treat his wound. During this time, he said to Jason, "Think you could be wrong again and get this wagon back home?"

"I'll be happy to give it a shot sir. Now if I could just remember what I did the last time," he replied with a slight grin.

Susan looked at Jason while squinting her eyes and said, "Jason..."

“You know I’m joking, the AMP will be ready to go in just a few minutes.”

“AMP, what’s that?” John asked.

Jason replied as if anybody could figure it out with ease, “Anti-Mass Propulsion of course.”

After a moment, Jason signalled the engine room and then said to John, “Hang on sir, you’re in for a hell of a ride.”

Several hours later, fireworks shot into the sky around the large vessel as it came into view. The landing struts exposed themselves from beneath the haul and ship gently sat down near several other vessels. Most of the nearby ships revealed damage that was equal to or greater than that of the Excalibur.

In the command pit, Kara asked John, “What are you going to do with the Grey on board?”

John replied, “I had a talk with him. It turns out he didn’t have anything to do with the assaults on us.”

“And you *believe* him?” Susan questioned.

John answered, “Despite the fact that he was at gunpoint throughout most the trip, he *still* decided to saved my life up there. I don’t think he’s told me everything. In fact, I think we are the last thing on his mind right now. I get the feeling that if even part of what he told me was true, we won’t be hearing from them for a while.”

“So your letting him go? How will he get home?” Kara asked.

John suggested, "I was hoping that you could take him. He made it clear you will not be fired on. To be safe, we'll be happy to send a ship or two along with you if it will help ease your mind."

"It would be a unique opportunity to learn the location of their world," she responded.

"Wait a minute," Jason said, "you mean you don't know? I thought you guys knew everything."

Kara smiled a bit, "We do know there is a world four light years from here with many different forms of primitive life. I believe you refer to the system as Alpha-Centauri. It is not the Imperium home world, but it may have something worth looking into."

"Well, maybe we should go check it out," Jason said.

"Actually," Kara replied, "I was thinking our two races could *check it out* together. This will aid in building our new relationship."

Susan said, "Sounds like a good project for the two of you."

Jason walked towards Susan and put his arm around her. Then he gave her a brief kiss on the cheek and said, "Only if you're coming too."

Susan's face turned a faint red. Then she said, "I'd love to go exploring with you Jason, *if* only busy calendar would allow it. You can only imagine what type of paperwork will be on my desk in the morning."

She then turned to John and said, “So what are *your* plans John?”

John replied, “I imagine the men in brass will want to debrief me on my experience inside the Grey ship. Then I feel we need to rebuild the fleet bigger and better.”

“But I thought you said the Grey won’t be a problem for a while,” Jason said.

John commented, “We are told there are a lot of other species out there, we can’t assume that they are all friendly. Based on the vague I got from Aturos, I think a greater challenge lies ahead at some point in time.”

“It’s good that you’re thinking ahead John, but I think all this can wait just a few hours. I assume there is someone very anxious to see you,” said Susan.

“That is my *first* order of business, Susan. In fact, I better get going. Somebody might want to prepare the Angarians on board with what to expect the moment they walk off this ship.”

“Party, Party, Party and lots of people,” said Jason.

Susan turned to Kara who appeared to be a bit nervous after hearing what Jason had said. She said to her, “Don’t worry sister, he stresses me out too sometimes. *But*, I wouldn’t have it any other way. Come on, I’ll walk you out. Might bring along with a few Marines just in case anybody tries to get fresh,” she said before winking her left eye.

About an hour later, John entered the Graviton complex. He looked around and recalled all the memories that he had there. He entered his former quarters where Jessica rushed to his arms. Among one of the first questions out of her mouth were, "Did you find Mommy?"

He sat down on the black leather couch with her and said, "You know, I don't think she was ever lost."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

He continued, "Well, we have this huge spaceship that will take us anywhere we wish to go. But it turns out we never needed it. This whole time she's been right here," he said as he pointed to Jessica's chest."

Jessica smiled and said, "You mean in our hearts?"

"That's right," he said, and so long as we keep her there, we'll never have to worry about her not being able to find us."

Jessica asked, "We'll we ever see her again?"

"Someday I think we might, but until then rest assured she's in a safe place where no body can hurt her, not *even* the evil aliens"

She hugged John's neck and said, "I miss her so much Daddy."

As he rubbed her back while saying, "I do too honey, but we got each other for now. We along with the entire world are all going to be okay now. From here on out, I see nothing but happiness in *the untold tomorrow*."

**Second Planet of the
Alpha-Draconis System**

Not far from the wreckage of a Grey shuttle, Zyron laid on what appeared to be a long table.

Several syringes and other devices plugged into his body. Above him was sort of view screen that repeatedly played back images contained inside his mind. One of the last images to be displayed was of the view screen inside the Incursive. This image clearly showed the Excalibur in Earth's orbit. While the screen remained on that image, a second monitor revealed the Excalibur resting just inside Alpha-Draconis star system. Moments later, a metamorphosis began to take place inside and outside of Zyron's body. He screamed in pain as his body began to mutate into something else.

A few feet away, a shed of light revealed to him the chilling face of his capture. The sight could only be defined as some sort of large reptilian creature. It growled as it viewed the Excalibur on the monitor. It was almost as if it was seen as a contamination of its lair. In a growling voice, the beast said aloud "The time has come. The future has arrived."

To be continued...

